University of Alberta

Plato's *Lovers*: A 'Measured' Introduction to Socratic Philosophy

by

Paul Jordan Diduch

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Abstract

Though generally neglected by most scholars of Plato, the following thesis argues that *Lovers* has important insights to offer regarding the nature of Socratic philosophy (thereby incidentally furnishing grounds for regarding the dialogue as an authentic work of Plato). More specifically, the dialogue throws light on why Socrates chooses to propagate philosophy in the manner revealed, thus calling attention to important problems that attend discussing philosophy with those who have not had, or may never have genuine philosophic experience. However, to arrive at this understanding of the dialogue requires a close consideration of both the substance of the argument, as well as determining and interpreting the relevant dramaturgical elements. The following commentary, then, weighs out the significance of both the form and content of Socrates' inquiry, as well as the larger context of the discussion, and shows how theses aspects of the dialogue combine to offer a coherent insight into Socratic philosophy.

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Introduction

When one surveys the history of philosophy, certain minds invariably emerge as more luminous than others, but scant few can be said to rival the towering presence of Plato. Indeed, even today, with the 'philosophic' climate being decidedly un-platonic, even anti-platonic, most would agree that Plato – though not the first philosopher - is nonetheless rightly deemed the father of our philosophic tradition. To uncover, then, what Plato thought about philosophy would recommend itself as a matter of crucial significance – a historical question of first importance. But this is not merely or simply an historical concern. In an important sense, learning *about* Plato is an effort that is redeemed only if we can learn *from* him as well; the latter requires that we hold out the possibility that Plato's thoughts about philosophy - his understanding of its nature and worth - constitute a permanent insight. To settle this question, however, would presuppose we know Plato's mind, and given our ignorance on this score, we must focus, then, on the initial task of carefully illuminating what he chose to express in writing.

This task is easier said than done. For nowhere in Plato's writings is there a statement disclosing his full understanding of philosophy. Indeed, quite the contrary:

> Nothing, I dare say, could sound more ridiculous to the multitude than these sayings, just as to gifted persons nothing could be more admirable and inspiring. One must talk about them and hear them expounded again and again, perhaps for many years, and even then their gold is with the utmost difficulty separated and refined. The most surprising thing about it is this: many a man of able understanding and tenacious memory has become old in the hearing of these doctrines and has told me that after more than thirty years of hearing them expounded, after examining them and testing them in every way, those points which at the beginning seemed most doubtful he now thinks to be the clearest and

> most self-evident of all, while the matters he then thought most credible are now quite the contrary. Keep this in mind and take care that you have no occasion in the future to feel remorse for now exposing these doctrines unworthily. The best precaution is not to write them down, but to commit them to memory; for it is impossible that things written should not become known to others. This is why I have never written on these subjects. There is no writing of Plato's, nor will there ever be; those that are now called so come from an idealized and youthful Socrates [Socrates made young and beautiful][1].

Still, the fact remains that Plato did write these 'Socratic' dialogues, and that he must, therefore, have regarded both his doing so and their content as consistent with his idea of philosophy. So, apart from important remarks on philosophy in the *Epistles*, we have thirty-five dialogues, each of which deals with matters of philosophic interest. And amongst the dialogues, a notable few include discussions about philosophy and / or the philosopher. But of the thirty-five, only one dialogue is solely and explicitly dedicated to this subject – *Erastai* or *Lovers.*

Given the dialogue's subtitle[2] and the sheer number of times the word 'philosophy' and its cognates appear[3], we have reason to expect that *Lovers* will offer some kind of insight into Plato's conception of philosophy. But upon first reading, the dialogue does not seem to reward these expectations. For what is initially striking is not so much what the dialogue reveals about philosophy, but what it seems to neglect. Compared, say, to *Republic*, the treatment of philosophy in *Lovers* seems flat and limited in scope; there is no talk of 'dialectics' or 'forms'; no analysis of epistemology or metaphysics. The discussion itself moves in un-anticipated ways; its strange turns seem to resist interpretation. On the whole, the peculiarities of the dialogue 'conspire' to give the impression that the *Lovers* does

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[1] Plato *Second Letter* 314a-c.
[2] *Lovers* is subtitled 'On Philosophy'. The subtitles of the dialogues are not generally thought to have been fixed by Plato, but may have been appended by one of his close students, or, at the very least, someone who seems to have understood each dialogue's thematic investigation.
[3] There are thirty-two such usages compacted into the short span of seven Staphanos pages.

not provide what we might have been looking for. One puts down the dialogue and feels as though any assumptions gained elsewhere about Plato's conception of philosophy are being squarely challenged by what is encountered in the text.

The feelings of disappointment the dialogue can evoke have been strong enough to compel some to dismiss it as un-platonic. Friedrich Schleiermacher, an otherwise well-intentioned scholar of Plato, declares

> The spuriousness of this little dialogue is proved with equal force by every thing we meet with in it from beginning to end, by its most outward dress, as well as by its most inward matter... Still more, undoubtedly, every reader will discover upon a nearer view a general and utter absence of platonic urbanity and irony, to which, however, the dialogue in its external form throughout makes immediately the most decided pretensions.[4]

Indeed, Schleiermacher is almost indignant that someone might have dared to include the dialogue with Plato's legacy: '...[E]ven for Plato's first exercise, this dialogue, so awkward and unmeaning as it is, would be far too bad'.[5]

Schleiermacher is one of a number of Nineteenth century scholars who labored intensely to sort out the 'genuine' Platonic texts from 'pseudo-platonic' imitations, dialogues hitherto regarded as authentic. We cannot provide a detailed account of the methods and arguments deployed by these men, as this falls well beyond the purview of this introduction.[6] Suffice it to mention that because of their collective efforts, a broad consensus was established to proscribe certain dialogues from Plato's oeuvre - many of which were then regarded as nothing more than historical curiosities. *Lovers*, like other dialogues which could potentially offer

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[4] *Schleiermacher's Introductions to the Dialogues of Plato.* All references to Schleiermacher will be to this volume, and to his preface to *Lovers* in particular (pp. 325-328). Trans. William Dobson, Cambridge, 1836.

[5] Ibid.

[6] For a valuable discussion of these and related concerns, see Thomas Pangle's introduction to *The Roots of Political Philosophy*.

valuable insights, fell into utter neglect. Since then, however, there has been an impetus among certain scholars to question the orthodoxies established by their (mainly German) predecessors. And due to their efforts, many dialogues have been restored to canonical standing. But however these scholars choose to stake out their positions, it is ultimately left to the reader to decide. Barring any blatant anachronisms, the only way to determine the genuine quality and, hence, authenticity of a dialogue is through one's own interpretive efforts. Thus we are led back to the objections of Schleiermacher as they largely pertain to the peculiarities of the dialogue. And while we grant him this, that *Lovers* is an oddity amongst Plato's works, its strangeness does not simply amount to grounds for dismissal.[7]

To take this up briefly, there are two curious features of the dialogue which give it the peculiar quality that Schleiermacher faults. First is the studied anonymity of the rival lovers, Socrates' two interlocutors. Schleiermacher goes so far as to suggest that the 'namelessness' of the lovers betrays the hand of an inferior imitator, as if the author left them without proper identities because the task overburdened his abilities. Merely stating it in these terms is enough to indicate its absurdity. But beyond that, we might point out that an anonymous character appears in two dialogues Schleiermacher himself says are bona fide Platonic: the Eleatic Stranger in *Sophist* and *Statesman*. And if we admit the *Laws* as a genuine dialogue – which features an 'Athenian Stranger' whom Aristotle treats as

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[7] As Pangle rightly notes:

> Now, if Plato could create a Socratic conversation as delightfully odd as the *Lesser Hippias*, who is to say with confidence what Plato could and could not have written? More generally, what limits can be set to the artistry and playfulness of such a genius?

Roots of Political Philosophy pg. 6.

'Socrates'[8]- we are obliged to concede that Plato must have had reason for omitting the precise identity of certain characters whenever he chose to do so. Must this not hold true for *Lovers* as well?

The second feature of the dialogue is the striking turn Socrates makes in the last leg of the argument. W.R.M. Lamb cites this as evidence of its inferior quality[9], and Schleiermacher is positively bothered by it.

> This discussion is followed lastly, by yet a third, whose object is to show that there are kinds of knowledge in which it is disgraceful for a man, such as a philosopher must be, to hold only that second rank beyond which multiscience cannot rise. But how much that is in no way connected with the subject, and which is serviceable to no end whatever, is mixed up with this last part!

Both men provide good examples of how Plato can be perplexing to the reader, but their consequent attitudes toward the dialogue are not worth emulating. To reject an argument because of its perceived oddness or even eccentricity is, apart from its presumption, to counsel resignation. For how should one approach whatever will invariably seem strange or odd as one proceeds through this and other dialogues?[10] Some, it seems, would rather carve up and arrange Plato's legacy according to their tastes and inclinations. The real challenge, however, is to approach the dialogues with fresh eyes and an open mind, especially since the entire canon of thirty-five dialogues was well established in antiquity, by philosophic scholars as serious and scrupulous as any today. Instead of forcing the arguments to ratify our preconceptions, and dismissing them if they don't, we ought to give Plato the intellectual charity he so clearly deserves, and allow the dialogues to speak for

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[8] *Politics* 2.6. Pangle reports that Schleiermacher's student F. Ast rejected the *Laws* as a genuine dialogue – even with the clear testimony of Aristotle as an endorsement of its authenticity. Ibid.
[9] 'Introduction to the Lovers' in *Plato XII Charmides...Epinomis*, Harvard University Press, pp 309-311.
[10] Again, see Plato's *Second Letter*, in particular, the portion quoted on pg. 1 of the Introduction.

themselves - even if they might at first jar with our understanding. How else could we possibly expect to learn from him?

The following study of Plato's *Lovers* takes its bearings from the question raised earlier: what does this peculiar dialogue have to teach us about Platonic philosophy? In the process of responding to this, we hope to meet and address some of the objections raised by Schleiermacher and others. We submit that the one major failing of said commentators is their misunderstanding of Plato's art of writing. The alternative interpretive approach we observe issues directly from how we understand Plato's response to the criticism of writing Socrates offers in *Phaedrus.*[11] Importantly, this response manifests Socrates' remarks concerning the principles of good composition – and thereby provides the 'reflexive' corrective to his critique. Socrates suggests to Phaedrus that a written work ought to be like a living creature, having a body of its own, a head and feet; there should be a middle, beginning and end, adapted to one another and to the whole. The best compositions manifest what he calls 'logographic necessity' – each part being set down purposefully according to the design of the author's intention.[12] As Leo Strauss observes

> In a word, one cannot take seriously enough the law of logographic necessity. Nothing is accidental in a Platonic dialogue; everything is necessary at the place where it occurs. Everything which would be accidental outside of the dialogue becomes meaningful within the dialogue. In all conversations chance plays a considerable role: all Platonic dialogues are radically fictitious. The Platonic dialogue is based on a fundamental falsehood, a beautiful or beautifying falsehood, *viz.* on the denial of chance.[13]

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[11] *Phaedrus* 274b-278d.
[12] Ibid. 264bc.
[13] *City and Man* pg. 60.

In his statement on how to read a Platonic dialogue, Leon Craig elaborates on Strauss' point and expounds on what it means to take the law of logographic necessity seriously.[14] Far from being an abstract methodology, the interpretive approach he sets forth – and which we will strive to employ – is fundamentally rooted in good common sense. That is, one ought to approach the dialogue *as if* everything were necessary:

> ...far better for oneself to assume, like a good scientist, that in the Platonic kosmos everything has a cause, and if one does not at first see what it is, one must try, try again... for the causes of things are often deeply buried. And in the mean time, it is simply prudent to acknowledge one's ignorance.[15]

With this advice in mind, we turn, then, to Plato's *Lovers*. Unwilling to be dissuaded by the opinions of 'experts', we will hope to provide a reasoned account of the whole dialogue, including those parts which are responsible for its unfortunate reputation. Our ultimate aim, however, is not to 'solve' the dialogue (whatever that might mean); rather we intend the following commentary and interpretive remarks to contribute to the reader's own interpretive efforts, as opposed to stultifying them with anything that pretends to be 'definitive'.

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[14] See the 'Prologue' to *The War Lover*.
[15] Ibid. xxxv.

I. Opening Context 132a-132bc

Upon entering the school of Dionysius, Socrates tells his auditor he first descried a number of notable boys, outstanding for both their looks and the good reputation of their fathers. He then mentions a second group he took to be the lovers of the first. Two of the boys of the first group were in the midst of a dispute, something of which Socrates infers from their gestures and not, as we might have expected, from the substance of their speech (which he claims not to have over heard, at least not plainly). From their hand movements Socrates further supposed the two were likely arguing over astronomical theories, perhaps those of Anaxagoras or Oinopides - the sort of 'philosophic' doctrines we now associate with certain 'pre-socratics'. He then proceeded to sit down amidst the second group, the lovers, and asked one of them about what the two boys have taken up in such a fervent manner: 'Presumably it is something great and noble on which the two have bestowed such great seriousness'[16].

These opening remarks alert us to some details we ought to note and keep in mind as we proceed through the dialogue. The venue for the discussion is the school of Dionysius, a place where the sons of good families go to learn the rudiments of a musical[17] education. The instruction is private, provided by a professional teacher, but presumably regarded as compatible with any learning the boys receive at home or from other citizens. The disputing students in this case are

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[16] References to *Lovers* refer to Plato, "Lovers", in *The Roots of Political Philosophy*, trans. James Leake. Any departures from this translation will be noted as they occur.

[17] 'Musical' (*mousikos*) is used in the wider sense, indicating kinds of learning that were traditionally thought of as governed by the Muses, everything from melody to astronomy. Cf Liddel & Scott's Intermediate Greek Lexicon.

two of the 'notable' boys; their lovers would be somewhat older, and thus past this stage of education. Socrates observes that the two boys appeared to be disputing over astronomical theories, but at this age and level of awareness it is unlikely they are able to appreciate the full significance of their activity. Like young students today who are taught about the solar system without learning astrophysics, these boys have been turned on to the subject but have not likely mastered the advanced mathematics involved[18]. More to the point, perhaps, the two surely do not appreciate how what they have learned might be in tension with certain traditional beliefs upheld by their families and city. Knowing what we do about Anaxagoras[19], there is the subtle suggestion the boys are being incidentally 'corrupted' by their education – at least from the standpoint of conservative tradition and piety. Clearly the ancestral accounts are being abandoned for novel theories; instead of Helios and his chariot, the boys are learning about ecliptics and fiery rocks[20]. By seeking to explain phenomena 'naturalistically', the 'scientific' approach is an open challenge to the traditional accounts of the cosmos, accounts which endorse the existence of

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[18]For the ancient Greeks astronomy was a matter of patient observation and geometrical reasoning, and until well past the Renaissance, astronomers regarded the truth of the heavens to be in principle indeterminable, as there was no conceivable way to prove one's theories. Their efforts were characterized as various attempts to 'save the appearances', which meant an attempt to provide the most complete and effective account of the movement of the celestial bodies as they appear to the human eye. In this connection we note that Socrates says the two boys are *disputing* (*erisonte*), perhaps because the question was incapable of a resolution, as they have no recourse to unproblematic evidence by which they might settle their disagreement.

[19] The framing of Socrates' narration seems to suppose his listener would know something of Anaxagoras, his doctrines and his life. Anaxagoras was tried for impiety and exiled from Athens; he spent his last days in Lampsacus, where he died in 428. Here we see that it is much easier to expel the man than it is to excise his doctrines from the community. See Guthrie's discussion of Anaxagoras in *A History of Greek Philosophy* Vol II, The Presocratic tradition from Parmenides to Democritus, pgs 266-338.

[20] If Meletus' impression of Socrates is any indication, Socrates may have been widely associated with some of the teachings of Anaxagoras. In the *Apology*, Socrates suggests that because Anaxagoras' books are readily available, he cannot be blamed for notions like 'the sun is stone and the moon is earth', which Meletus wants to use as evidence of Socrates' atheism, 26d-e.

the divine and are integrated with the religious foundations of civic virtue. But would the fathers of these boys, the fathers who are of good standing in the city, be concerned if they were intimately familiar with what was going on at Dionysius' school? It is unlikely. At this time much of Athens' upper class doubtless thinks stories like that of Helios and his chariot are quaint, and not to be taken too seriously except perhaps metaphorically or allegorically[21]. But because Anaxagoras' trial reminds us of the eventual fate of Socrates, the issue of philosophy and its corrupting effects on the youth is undoubtedly germane.[22] However, the more immediately pertinent point is that philosophy (or what popularly passes for it) is an established presence in the city. But as Socrates' conversation with the two lovers will illustrate, opinions about its nature, status and worth are divided; philosophy may be established in the city, but its reputation remains controversial.

Additionally, Socrates' references to conflicting astronomical 'authorities' remind us of his own familiarity with natural philosophy. We know, from the *Phaedo* for instance, that the young Socrates was once actively involved with the study of nature and made an effort to learn the doctrines of Anaxagoras. Here, his experience in these matters is evinced by his ability to tell what the boys are disputing about from their hand movements alone. We see a trace, then, of Socrates' connection to natural philosophy. But is there any significance to this

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[21] Pericles' Funeral Oration might be taken to show how a certain pride in being 'cultivated' – which included a professed 'openness' to the growth of knowledge – was bound up with the 'cosmopolitanism' characteristic of Athens' ruling and upper classes. Thucydides *History* 2.40-2.41.
[22] Cf. Bruell's suggestion that *Lovers* is part of the four dialogues which constitute Socrates' frank and uncompelled apology, Pg. 92 *The Roots of Political Philosophy*. Generally speaking, the issue of corruption and Socrates' trial lurks behind all of the Platonic dialogues.

beyond setting the scene? Perhaps we are being alerted to a contrast; it seems the Socrates who is recounting this episode is somewhat different than Socrates the natural scientist, as parodied in Aristophanes' *Clouds*. The fact that he is interested in talking to young men, that this may be the express purpose of his going into the school, is enough to begin distinguishing this Socrates from the eccentric, socially indifferent man presented by Aristophanes. Aware as we are of at least two views of Socrates, we have to wonder how the young men and boys at the school – or for that matter, the anonymous audience to whom he is narrating this account - perceive the philosopher. Do they partake of the popular view, a view coloured by the comedic poetry of Aristophanes? Or do they have reason to regard him more favourably?

II. Dramatis Personae 132b-d

As we have mentioned, one of the striking, almost awkward, features of this dialogue is the way Socrates has chosen to speak of the characters he interacts with. The only participant we know by name is Socrates, who has, for reasons we will explore, decided to omit the names of the others present at the discussion. Now, it might be the case that Socrates simply does not know anyone by name[23]. We see that at least one of the young men knows who Socrates is (132c), but the philosopher does not tell his auditor that he ever asked to find out who exactly the

[23] Though Socrates seems to know that the two boys are from a reputable family. It might be the case that only boys from families of prominence – political, financial or both – attend the school of Dionysius. In his life of Plato, Diogenes Laertius reports that Plato was 'taught letters in the school of Dionysius, who is mentioned by him in the *Rivals*' (*Rivals* being an alternative title for this dialogue) III. 5.

others were. This reminds us of the fact that Socrates is narrating the dialogue to one or more anonymous friends, who must be sufficiently interested in the conversation to hear it out, but may not necessarily care about the names of undistinguished youths.

Socrates begins by noting that there were two separate groups present at the school: the handsome, 'well-formed' boys, and their lovers. The two disputing boys remain indistinguishable from each other, though only one of them is the object of contention between the lovers. But other than the fact that both evince a taste for arguments, we know nothing more particular about them. Looking ahead to the action of the dialogue, however, allows us to add a little more substance to their profiles: the two boys both stop their disputing to listen to Socrates' conversation with the lovers, both laugh at the embarrassment of the musical lover, and both praise the outcome of the discussion. And from what he divulges later (133a-b), it seems the two especially attract Socrates' erotic attention.

The young men after whom the dialogue is titled are given more definition. Both lovers receive 'equal billing', despite the gross disproportion in their respective contributions. The first of the two, the one Socrates nudges to open the discussion, betrays a dismissive but not uncommon attitude toward philosophy: 'What do you mean 'great and noble'! They are babbling about the heavenly things, and they are talking nonsense, philosophizing'. We should recall that prior to asking what the boys were disputing about, Socrates told his anonymous auditor that he thought the two boys were arguing about astronomy, and that even without having clearly heard the subject of their dispute, he was able to surmise that their

argument concerned identifiable theories. Because we too are privy to this, we can see that Socrates is feigning ignorance in order to solicit the first lover's opinion on the matter: it seems Socrates is not especially interested in *what* the two boys are arguing about, but *how* the boys' dispute is being perceived. This much seems clear, but we have to wonder why he chose to question this lover in particular; did he anticipate how the young man would respond? Or would he have asked the same question to the other lover? If Socrates did anticipate the answer he received, he hides it well by saying he was surprised (he marvelled) at the young man's response. Now Socrates could have anticipated this response and still been surprised at the vehemence with which it was expressed (his next question is why the young man speaks so harshly). If this lover despises philosophy as much as he implies, we might presume he would have reservations about his beloved, as the boy clearly seems interested in 'philosophical' questions. We do not, however, hear the lover's response to Socrates (for he is interrupted), and are thus left to speculate over his true views on philosophy. It is certainly possible his remarks do not represent his entire opinion on the matter, and that he might have an ulterior reason to scoff at philosophy, something which may take priority over answering Socrates honestly.

Curious about the intensity of his harsh response, Socrates asks the young man if he thinks philosophy is shameful. But before he can answer the question, the other lover intercedes: 'You're not acting as becomes you, Socrates, even to ask this fellow if he considers philosophy to be shameful. Or do you not know that this one has passed his whole life putting others in a headlock, stuffing himself and

sleeping? So what did you suppose he would answer except that philosophy is shameful?'

At this point Socrates offers some brief narrative comment, telling how he characterized the two young men: the one who had intervened 'spent his time on music; the other, whom he was abusing, had spent his on athletics'. This remark alerts us to the tension between the rival lovers, and goes some way to explain why the musical lover attempts to commandeer the discussion. Considering both the manner and substance of his speech, we see his motives are rather obvious. The musical lover seeks to ally himself with Socrates; he wants to utilize Socrates' more mature authority to substantiate his abuse of the athlete. In this the musical lover is rather presumptuous; not only does he answer for the athlete, he assumes Socrates would rather speak to him – that they are 'like-minded' – and so would not want to waste his time with someone who is 'obviously' un-philosophic.[24]

In light of the musical lover's remarks, Socrates tells his auditor he decided to 'release' the athlete from questioning, and take up the overture of his rival, adding that the athlete 'didn't even claim to be experienced in speeches, but rather deeds.'[25] Socrates goes on to say he thought he ought to question the one who

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[24] Clearly, Socrates' reputation precedes him. And given the inclinations of the musical lover, we might suggest that Socrates' reputation does not seem to differentiate him from other 'intellectuals' the musical lover would desire to associate with.

[25] The verb is *prosepoieito,* which Leake has chosen to translate as 'claim'. This is a touchy word, but seems to refer more to the affect of one's disposition than to a spoken announcement, thus Leake's translation threatens to be misleading. As the word is used here, it does not seem to refer to anything the athlete says, so, at least for this section of the dialogue, Socrates does not appear to be omitting portions of the discussion (we should note that Socrates is reprising this episode after the fact, that is, after he was able to take the time to assess all of those involved). However, if the verb 'claim' does refer to something the athlete said, Socrates' omission of his statement gives the impression that the athlete has not contributed much to the conversation thus far. If we consider this possibility, the athlete's remark might have been telling of his character. For example, if the athlete had said to Socrates that he 'does not know much about speeches', he would seem to be comfortable professing his ignorance in front of both Socrates and the musical lover. Putting a high

claimed to be wiser: 'so that I might also, if I could, receive some benefit from him'. This remark deserves some attention. Firstly, we have to wonder what Socrates' comment indicates about his opinion of the athlete: has he lost interest in him altogether, or is there something in his observing the athlete's domain of experience? Socrates knows the athlete is more likely to be impressed by action, or deeds, than by words, a fact which might bear on how he conducts the balance of the discussion. Secondly, the question of benefit arises. Socrates claims he chose to speak to the musical lover 'who claimed to be wiser', so that he might benefit from him. He seems to imply that he would not have anticipated benefiting in this way by talking with the athlete. But what are we to make of Socrates' modesty; is this anything more than an obvious instance of his infamous irony? In speaking up as he did, the musical lover implies that he knows what is in Socrates' best interest (thus his tacit 'claim' to be wiser). But does Socrates really believe he has something to learn from him? If this is not what Socrates' intended, it is not at all clear what he could mean by 'benefit'. Presuming this comment is ironic (and not merely sarcastic), and that Socrates is not being altogether disingenuous, what he might learn from the musical lover may have more to do with the youth's character than any specific 'teaching' he could offer[26]. At the very least we know that Socrates professes to have pursued the conversation with his own benefit in mind, which might bear on how he conceives the pursuit of wisdom. But in this regard we

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interpretation on this, we might say that the athlete shows self-awareness by recognizing his ignorance, and shows good character in not allowing the pressure of the situation to compel him to make claims he is not entitled to. The athlete's confidence and honesty in this regard may serve as a foil to his rival.

[26] This is not to suggest that Socrates would not be interested in the knowledge the young man 'claims' to have, that is, if he indeed proves to have it.

cannot forget the anonymous auditor, and the fact that Socrates found it worthwhile to reprise this encounter to him[27]- and that Plato thought it worthy of a reader's consideration.

Socrates has little explicit to say in the way of describing his interlocutors, but we have seen enough of the dialogue to profile roughly each of the two rivals. As we mentioned, the athlete's response to Socrates betrays a rather common attitude toward philosophy. As an athletic lover, he is concerned with his body[28] and physical activity, hence not so apt to appreciate contemplative effort. But his love for the handsome boy suggests he harbours higher forms of attraction; he has chosen a 'notable' boy to pursue, and is thus not strictly motivated by a love of pleasure[29]. And because the athlete is engaged in a contest for attention, he may not be as intolerant of philosophy as his initial remarks suggest. However, so long as he remains put off by his rival's arrogant claim to wisdom – which seems to rely on denigrating the unsophisticated – the athlete will assume a defensive posture and continue to countenance opinions hostile to philosophy. On the other side of this rivalry we have the musical lover, a young man who resembles what we might call a smug or pretentious intellectual. We do not know who started this contest of insults, but it is clear the musical lover has staked his claim for preference on his intellectual merits, and seems confident they are as worthy as, if not superior to, physical prowess.

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[27] We should also note the possibility that Socrates uses this ironic remark for the sake of his auditor. That is, he throws a veil over his motives so as to not have to explain himself to someone who may not understand. Those who are familiar with Socrates would surely be aware of his ironic manner. Socrates' remark here may indicate that his auditor does not seem to know him that well.

[28] Presuming his rival does not overly exaggerate his athletic preoccupation, cf. 132c.

[29] He may be sensitive to the boy's beauty, and / or his status and lineage. If sexual pleasure was his only concern, he surely could have found an easier conquest.

Interestingly, because of Socrates' question, their rivalry has come into the open over the value of philosophy – indeed, both seem to represent types characterized by a specific attitude towards this very question. It is too early to say what the full significance of this may be, but perhaps the two rivals signify a typical split in opinion on how philosophy is apt to be regarded within a given political community. We might add that because Socrates gives no indication of when the actual encounter took place or when he is giving this narrated recollection, an effect of *timelessness* is achieved which heightens the generic character of the types involved (as opposed to their being particular individuals with idiosyncratic histories, opinions and tastes).

III. Turn to the Argument 132d-133c

Socrates has told his auditor he chose to question the musical lover, presuming he would benefit more from conversing with one experienced in speech. Polite as he is, Socrates does not declare his intention to the two rivals, but instead manages an inoffensive transition, seemingly concerned lest he alienate the athlete from the rest of the discussion. Turning to the musical lover, Socrates remarks: 'I asked the question of you in common. But if you suppose you could answer more nobly than this one, I ask you the same question I asked him, whether it seems to you to be noble or not to philosophize?'

Comparing this with what Socrates addressed to the athlete, we can clearly see the question is not the same, and so – strictly speaking – was not posed to both

in common. The athlete was asked if he thought philosophy is shameful, not whether it is noble. But is this not simply a matter of semantics; are the 'not noble' and the 'shameful' just two sides of the same coin, similarly with the 'not shameful' and the 'noble'? Socrates' questions might seem to suggest as much, but thinking in terms of strict opposites can be misleading, as the case of nobility and shame will illustrate. Clearly, if something's being 'not noble' necessarily meant it is shameful, most of us would have a prejudiced evaluation of our day-to-day lives. For, typically, we do not regard meeting our daily necessities as noble, but it would seem ridiculous to think of buying groceries or taking the bus as positively shameful activities. Similarly, if we say it is shameful *not* to be able to do something, being able to do it need not imply that one is doing something noble. This would hold for things like dressing oneself, cooking for oneself, and in some cases, even defending oneself. Thus we see there is not an equivalence between the 'not noble' and shameful; likewise with the 'not shameful' and noble. There is a middle-ground between the two opposing categories, an evaluative range which is obscured if one thinks only in terms of strict dichotomies. Returning to Socrates' initial question to the athlete then, we might further illustrate the point by considering different ways he could have responded: 'Yes, Socrates I do think philosophy is shameful' or 'No, but neither is it noble', or 'No Socrates, I think philosophy is trivial and useless, but not actually shameful', or 'Sometimes it is shameful, other times not, still other times neither'. All of these answers are possible, but which response is the athlete *most likely* to give? We have to wonder if philosophy is the sort of thing people have a 'neutral' opinion of. At this stage in

the dialogue we have no basis for judging whether philosophy is noble, or shameful, or neither, or sometimes one, sometimes the other. But the fact remains that the two rivals seem to have pronounced opinions on the matter. Politically speaking, the significance of this should not be overlooked, for how philosophy is generally viewed by the community will have a direct bearing on who is likely to take it up. If philosophy is widely regarded as a shameful activity- or even as so much nonsense – spirited and otherwise promising youths are unlikely to be drawn to it, as they tend to be especially sensitive to ridicule and embarrassment. This may leave the way open for lesser types to 'philosophize' without being called to account by someone of superior talents – and needless to say, this aggravates the problem of philosophy's controversial reputation.[30] The athlete may scoff at philosophy to denigrate his rival, but the effect of his derisive remarks may have wider reaching consequences.

Before going on to recount the musical lover's response, Socrates describes a change in the dialogic situation. The two boys, having overheard what had been said thus far, ceased their dispute to listen to the discussion developing between Socrates and the lovers. The timing of this remark seems pertinent, and invites us to consider what precisely has piqued their curiosity (that Socrates situates this action between a question and an answer is telling in this regard). It seems the turning point for the boys was their overhearing Socrates' question concerning the nobility of philosophy, and that either the mention of 'nobility' or 'philosophy' or both together is what captured their attention. Young as they are, it is unlikely they have subjected whatever opinions they have on the matter to much scrutiny, and for

[30] Cf. *Republic* end of book 5 through book 6 for a more thorough analysis of this phenomenon.

this reason may be especially interested in what their elders think of the noble, and whether philosophy is something which is recognized as such. In any event, the two boys, at least momentarily, have redirected their attention from the 'heavenly' to the human things.

On what would seem a much more 'personal note', Socrates tells how he was affected by the boys' shift in attention: 'I don't know what the lovers felt, but as for myself, I was stricken wild. For I'm always stricken wild by the young and the beautiful'. Now, this has to be one of the more curious remarks made in the dialogue. It seems a rare glimpse into Socrates' state of mind, yet the abruptness and intensity of the remark makes it seem strangely awkward, perhaps even calculated. Presuming 'stricken wild' pertains to desire, we are reminded both of Socrates' claim to know of nothing but erotic matters,[31] and his reputation for pursuing the young and beautiful.[32] We have no way of knowing whether Socrates is being completely honest here, and we should remember the aside is made to an auditor who may think of Socrates in terms of his alleged weakness for young men. But why would Socrates profess to having such an extreme response? Is he *simply* providing his auditor with an 'all too human' reason for being at the school? And we have to wonder whether the boys or lovers detected any trace of Socrates' supposedly intense arousal. Assuming Socrates has not told an outright lie, it seems we are alerted to a question this dialogue may not give us the tools to resolve. It is certainly conceivable that Socrates was struck by the sheer physical beauty of the young boys, and simply reports his reaction. But, we might suggest that something

[31] *Theages* 128b, cf. Socrates speech in *Symposium* 201d-212b.
[32] *Protagoras* 309a-b.

about the timing itself contributed to Socrates' response, implying he is also reacting to the beauty of their souls. The fact that the boys are prompted by the question of nobility and philosophy may indicate something of their character, something which shines through now as opposed to earlier in the dialogue. If Socrates was reacting only to their physical beauty, we might have expected this response to have been included with his opening narration, for he obviously observed them carefully, as his interpretation of their dispute indicates. But what the possible relation is between sheer physical allure and a higher or sublimated attraction to psychic beauty is uncertain. Moreover, how this hierarchy of beauty and corresponding love bears on Socrates' own philosophic efforts is something we are likely meant to think about, but cannot address here.

Initially, Socrates said he did not know how the lovers were affected by the boys' attention, but then he suggests it seemed to him 'the other was no less in agony than I'[33]. Socrates alerts us to the erotic tension building behind the conversation, a tension that is affecting the musical lover, whether or not it was affecting Socrates in the way he implies. In any case, Socrates says that the musical lover finally answered the question 'in a manner that showed his great love of honor'. Like the athlete, the musical lover is keen to 'one up' his rival, and attempts to use his speeches to stage himself favourably in the eyes of his beloved: 'Now Socrates, if ever I should consider it shameful to philosophize, I would not even hold myself to be a human being, nor anyone else so disposed'. As he made

[33] It might be worth noting that Socrates says the musical lover was affected by the two boys' redirecting their attention, but says nothing of how this might have affected the athlete.

this remark, Socrates says the musical lover pointed to the athlete and spoke in a loud voice so his favourite might hear him plainly.[34]

Because of the tension between the two rivals, it is difficult to be certain that this remark represents the musical lover's sober opinion. Assuming it is not grossly exaggerated, the musical lover has a very high notion of what philosophy is; and because he extols it publicly, he clearly thinks his opinion is defensible. Implicit in his remark is the suggestion that philosophy is an activity that is altogether fitting for a human being (a distinctly human activity); conceivably, this is something Socrates might agree with - perhaps the youth even made the remark with Socrates in mind. But the statement itself is a conclusion about the value of philosophy, and we have to wonder what sort of assumptions the musical lover has about philosophy that makes it seem so exalted to him. We cannot yet say for sure, but the musical lover may have a 'true opinion' about philosophy, but seems not to know how to defend his assessment, or does not know why his opinion is true. From what we can glean here, the fact that he insults the athlete for being obtuse to the value of philosophy at the very least indicates he has not thought much about human differences, nor understood why the value of philosophy may not be altogether self-evident to the athlete's more commonsense perspective. To hold on to his claim, the musical lover will have to account for what philosophy is, and in such a way as to account for why it is such a high and noble activity. Accordingly, this is what Socrates turns to next.

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[34] We should recall that the athlete did not have a chance to respond to Socrates' question as to whether he did regard philosophy as shameful.

Having made sure he is clear on the musical lover's assessment of philosophy, Socrates asks him a question which sets the course for the balance of the discussion: 'Does it seem to you to be possible to know with regard to anything whether it is noble or shameful, if one doesn't know to begin with what it is?'

The question itself is worth some consideration. Socrates asks if one can evaluate something before knowing what it is, but we might ask what would incline a person to try to understand what something is if they did not have a sense of its value? The basic point seems to be that we tend to rely on a sense of what is noble or beautiful (not to say good, important, necessary, curious, awesome, wonderful) to guide our pursuits. At an unreflective, one might say instinctive level, some things stand out as being more desirable than others, while other things recede into the background and still others seem utterly repulsive. It is worth noting that in this regard Socrates had just reminded us of the innate human capacity to recognize the beautiful. And as we have suggested, this capacity seems to bear on not only what kinds of bodies we find attractive, but also the kinds of souls or 'ways of life' we find desirable. To varying degrees, at least three out of the four listening to Socrates seem to think that philosophy is something worth pursuing, an opinion which may be rooted in a perception of philosophical activity itself as being something attractive, something perceived as noble or beautiful[35].

[35] For those of us drawn to philosophy, we might think about what initially captured our attention. Speaking in terms of reading Plato, we might say that the person of Socrates, Plato's beautified portrait of Socrates, has a bearing on our initial fascination with philosophy, in conjunction with the allure of certain questions. The character of Socrates arouses wonder, a response which seems to be a mixture of admiration for Socrates' nobility (his beautiful soul), and perplexity regarding his strangeness.

IV. The Argument, Part One 133c-135a

Confident in his abilities, the musical lover assures Socrates he knows 'what it is to philosophize'[36]. To introduce his definition he calls upon the authority of a sage and lawgiver: 'For Solon said somewhere, "I grow old, always learning many things"[37], and thus it seems to me that the one who is going to philosophize ought always to be learning at least some one thing, both when he is younger and when he is older, so that he may learn as much as possible in his life'.

This seems like something almost anyone would praise, including Socrates (as is suggested by his initial response – 'he seemed to me to be saying something'). But upon reflection, Socrates apparently observes a problem with this conception, which his next question makes explicit. He reveals that the musical lover has equated the love of wisdom with 'much learning' (*polymathein*), which could mean the learning of *any* subject matter, as if everything knowable is equally important – as if a philosopher could be someone with an encyclopaedic knowledge of trivial facts. The problem for the musical lover is that 'much learning' may include subjects he himself would deem ignoble, and so does not explain why this conception of philosophy can be defended as a noble activity. We should also note a subtle shift in terminology. Socrates initially asked: 'Do you know then what it is to *philosophize*'; whereas after the musical lover's response Socrates asks 'whether

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[36] The question posed to the musical lover was 'Do you know what it is to philosophize?', which is the closest we get to what would be the 'Socratic' question, 'What is philosophy?'.

[37] Solon's saying is used by the 'musical' Nicias in *Laches* (188b) as he discusses his apparent openness to conversing with Socrates. The saying is later modified by the more practical Laches (189a). As James Nichols points out, this same saying is critiqued by Socrates in *Republic* 536d. *Roots of Political Philosophy* pg. 251.

he held *philosophy* to be much learning'.[38] Without making too much of this, we wish to suggest that the notion of 'philosophizing' places emphasis on the activity, whereas 'philosophy' can be interpreted to mean a body of knowledge. Granted, the musical lover has used Solon's remark to describe philosophy as a constant process, but there is a sense in which he has distorted the initial term to mean something like 'the indiscriminate increase of a body of knowledge'. There may be a good deal of difference between conceiving philosophy as a 'quest' or 'longing' for wisdom versus the idea that philosophy is the process of becoming learned in many things. Undoubtedly the two notions somehow relate to one another, such that people might carelessly conflate them[39]. But in questioning the musical lover's answer, Socrates implicitly raises the pertinent question: what is there that distinguishes philosophic activity and its results from mere learning and knowledge acquisition.

Socrates next asks the musical lover if he considers philosophy 'to be merely noble, or also good?', thereby attempting to define further the musical lover's conception of philosophy. We have to remember Socrates is attempting to see if the musical lover's conception of philosophy *is noble* (the original question, 133b), but he has chosen to focus the question on what philosophy *is*. The transition allows for the question of its nobility to fade out of view, but without having taken this up, Socrates proceeds on the assumption that philosophy is noble.

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[38] Both are my emphasis.
[39] Cf. *Republic* 475b-e.

The task now is to see if the musical lover's definition squares with this assumption, which is modified to include its goodness[40].

The musical lover, having emphatically agreed that philosophy is something both noble and good ('very much so'), Socrates asks him if this conjunction of qualities is peculiar to philosophy or if it holds for other things. Suggestively guiding him along, Socrates offers love of athletics as a possible example of something that is 'not merely noble but also good' (again, the way in which Socrates phrased this implies its nobility is taken for granted). Of all the things Socrates could have put forth, this example is obviously quite deliberate. We have already heard the musical lover denigrate the athlete, and by extension, disparage the value of athletics. It seems Socrates wants to put the musical lover in a difficult situation, as he will now either have to retract his earlier remarks or renew his criticism of athletics. If he chooses the latter, he may be forced to re-state his initial definition of philosophy (philosophy as 'much learning'), because athletics is of course something 'knowable', something for which he has not provided grounds for excluding. The musical lover could also say he thinks the love of athletics is either noble *or* good (but not both together), thus subordinating athletics to philosophy. He does not do this however, but instead offers two responses: one to tweak his rival and the other to avert the need to tell a bald-faced lie: 'Let it be said by me to this fellow [the athlete] that it is neither; to you however, Socrates I grant that it is both noble and good. For I hold that to be correct'.

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[40] Without establishing what the noble is, Socrates' approach may itself seem questionable. We should note that Socrates never explicitly addresses the question of the nobility of philosophy.

In regard to this response, Socrates says 'very ironically, he spoke in a double fashion'; but what exactly is *ironic* about the musical lover's response?[41] This is strange because the musical lover openly declares his duplicity, further evidence of a boastful, not subtle manner. He condescends to his rival by suggesting a response he admits he does not believe, and offers the opposite response to Socrates in accord with what he regards as true. His handling of the situation is rather crude, and it seems he lavishes the opportunity to lord it over his rival. Apparently, he feels confident in his abilities to argue successfully a position he considers false: that is to say, the musical lover seems certain of his ability to make the weaker speech the stronger (cf.134c). We should remember that Socrates earlier pointed out the musical lover's 'great love of honor' (133a), a psychological trait which bears directly on why the young man seems primarily concerned with being victorious in argument. That the musical lover is blunt and so openly confident in his skill at arguing is anything but subtle, and seems to betray no savvy for irony at all. A clever ironist would have made a single response which suggested one thing to the athlete and another to Socrates without completely revealing himself to either. What *is* ironic here is that irony would have done the job, but the musical lover, a self-declared clever speaker, appears incapable of it.

What is of more interest is that by characterizing the musical lover's speech as ironic, Socrates seems to be indicating what he thinks the work of true irony is: that it is a form of 'double' speech which both conceals and reveals one's true

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[41] For a good discussion of this segment of the dialogue see R.J. Williams' M.A. Thesis '*Philosophy and Politics... A Study of Plato's Erastai*' (pp. 37-40), submitted to the Dept. of Political Science, University of Alberta, Fall 1987.

intentions and self-understanding[42]. And because this is brought to our attention here, Socrates may be cueing us to how he is handling the conversation. By pointing to the nature and use of irony, we have to consider the possibility that Socrates intends his remarks to be interpreted differently by those present, and perhaps his whole recollection to be interpreted differently by his anonymous auditor or auditors. In itself, this would add another layer of irony to the situation, as Socrates 'the ironist'[43] is tacitly comparing himself with the un-ironic musical lover. In this regard, we might recall – and reconsider –Socrates' apparent modesty (132d), which would contrast his veiled superiority with the musical lover's presumptive arrogance. This comparison seems to contribute to the distinction we drew earlier (pp. 9-11) between Socrates the 'natural scientist' and the Socrates of this dialogue. Aristophanes' Socrates has the appearance of being proud and boastful[44], which is here set off against Socrates' 'modesty' and polite self-concealment. Part of the difference we discern is that Socrates seems to have found reason to dissimulate his self-understanding which would mean he has become sensitive to how he is perceived. And his sensitivity in this regard would contribute to his ability to communicate more successfully with different types of people[45] (perhaps simultaneously).

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[42] As far as I am aware, this is the only place in the Platonic corpus where Socrates characterizes something as ironic.

[43] Cf. *Republic* 337a, *Symposium* 216e and *Apology* 38a for evidence of Socrates' reputation for being an ironic speaker.

[44] *Clouds* 361-64.

[45] Leo Strauss has a comment I have found helpful in terms of articulating the fuller significance of 'Socratic irony':

> Irony is then the noble dissimulation of one's worth, of one's superiority. We may say, it is the humanity peculiar to the superior man: he spares the feelings of his inferiors by not displaying his superiority. The highest form of superiority is the superiority in wisdom. Irony in the highest sense will then be the dissimulation of one's wisdom. i.e. the

The musical lover having acknowledged love of athletics to be noble and good, Socrates suggests a parallel between the two 'noble and good' activities: 'Well then, in the case of athletics do you hold that much exercising is love of athletics?' The musical lover makes the ostensible connection: 'Certainly, just as I hold that much learning in the case of philosophizing is love of wisdom'. Socrates next turns to the motives of the lovers of athletics, asking if they 'desire anything other than that which will cause them to be in good bodily condition'. Socrates' assumption seems to be accurate, that those who take up athletics do desire good bodily condition, but his leading remark is not exhaustive. We might ask: do people take up athletics for the sake of health alone, or are physical attractiveness (self-beautification), or training for competition other, equally strong incentives? Indeed, 'love of athletics' could be taken to mean 'love of athletic competition'. Health, physical beauty and athletic excellence are desirable goods, but as anyone who has gone to a gym knows, there is a discernable difference between those who are there for health reasons, those who exercise to augment their appearance, and those training for competition. What is interesting is how intertwined these motives can be; one might start exercising for health reasons, love the effects and become quite serious about enhancing one's physique. Because the love of athletics and love of wisdom are being compared by Socrates, we have to wonder if there are

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dissimulation of one's wise thoughts. This can take two forms: either expressing on a "wise" subject such thoughts (e.g. generally accepted thoughts) as are less wise than one's own thoughts or refraining from expressing any thoughts regarding a "wise" subject on the ground that one does not have knowledge regarding it and therefore can only raise questions but cannot give answers. If irony is essentially related to the fact that there is a natural order of rank among men, it follows that irony consists in speaking differently to different kinds of people. *City and Man* pg. 51.

See also Leon Craig's valuable discussion of Socratic irony in his *Prologue* to *The War Lover* (pp. xxx – xxxii).

similar motives – perhaps a similar complex entanglement of motives - which make philosophy attractive to different types[46].

The musical lover having agreed that 'much exercise' is love of athletics, and that the lover of athletics desires good bodily condition, Socrates next asks him if much exercise is the cause of good bodily condition. The musical lover agrees, and adds 'for how could anyone be in good bodily condition from little exercise?' This last remark might indicate that the musical lover has a simple, unreflective opinion of athletics; an opinion based on the 'natural' assumption that the best physical condition is the result of much exercise. The problem with the musical lover's response is that he leaves himself open to being misunderstood, as though what he means to say is that the *most* exercise is *always* best for the body – something which, if he had any experience in the gymnasium- he would know to be false. But we should note that he hasn't said 'most'- he says 'much'; and most athletes would likely agree with him.

To test the musical lover's position, Socrates encourages the athlete to join the discussion, supposedly so that he might bring his experience to bear on what was said: 'Why are you being silent, excellent one, while he is saying these things? Does it seem to you, too, that men are in good condition, with respect to their bodies, from much exercise, or is it from the measured amount?' This 'invitation' to the athlete may not be as innocent as it first seems. That is, Socrates is not merely encouraging him to join the discussion, but has handed him an opportunity

[46] For example, the musical lover's desire for honour. Also it is worth noting that if love of athletics is, in an important sense love of competition, then exercises would be a means to a higher end, whereas learning is the end for the lover of learning, and perhaps the lover of wisdom. Notice, however, that it is more difficult to simulate the effects of exercise (or the appearance of health), than it is to simulate learnedness or wisdom.

to take a swipe at his rival. Notice that Socrates asks if men are in good bodily condition from either much exercise, or (rather) *from the measured amount*: the question contains the desired response, and all the athlete has to do is recognise it and follow through. Additionally, we should point out that Socrates' use of the term 'measured amount' is rather vague; it does not necessarily mean 'a moderate amount', or something like a mean between 'much and the little'. The measured amount of exercise would be the amount which produces good bodily condition, but the precise amount would vary from individual to individual, some needing more and some less - and in all cases, quite a lot to be in *peak* condition[47].

Taking full advantage of Socrates' question, the athlete responds by suggesting that the answer is obvious: even a pig would know that it is the measured amount of exercise which produces good bodily condition[48]. He goes on to poke fun at the musical lover's appearance, which highlights the humour of the fact that the musical lover, who may be obviously un-athletic, has tried to speak knowingly about the love of athletics. Socrates tells his auditor that the two boys were pleased with the athlete's response and burst into laughter, while the musical lover blushed. His embarrassment is heightened by the fact that the athlete has trumped him with speech, supposedly something Socrates said he claimed to have no experience with (132d). What is more, if we recall the sequence of the argument, we can see why the musical lover has good reason to be disconcerted.

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[47] As Bruell notes, because one would have to rely on personal experience to differentiate between the measured amount and much exercise, Socrates' question to the athlete is 'perhaps not as superfluous as it might appear to be'. Pg. 95 *The Roots of Political Philosophy*.

[48] Notice that this response is directed at something the musical lover said earlier, and betrays the athlete's wit. The musical lover had said it would be sub-human to consider philosophy a shameful activity (133b); the athlete 'avenges' this by saying even the sub-human (a pig) recognizes the rule that prevails with regard to the body.

Initially, he agreed that one cannot say something is noble if one does not first know what it is. The musical lover then agreed with Socrates that love of athletics is both noble and good, affirming that this was his true opinion. But now, by having his ignorance of athletics exposed, he has compromised his standing as a competent speaker, and all that he has agreed to thus far is tainted with suspicion. Importantly, this may pertain equally to the musical lover's definition of philosophy ('much learning'), for if love of athletics and love of wisdom are somehow similar in this respect (as the musical lover confirmed), much learning cannot be that which produces a good 'philosophic' condition – at least this is how the refutation would be perceived. We should add, however, that the validity of correlating love of wisdom with love of athletics remains questionable – and the idea that philosophy is 'a measured amount of learning' is very strange.[49]

Socrates next asks the musical lover if he will concede the point, that the measured amount, not many or few exercises, is what produces good bodily condition - 'or will you fight it out with *the two of us* concerning the argument?'[50] This last remark seems to point to Socrates' intention for setting up the argument in the way he did. By helping him embarrass his rival, Socrates claims an alliance with the athlete, which, apparently, the athlete does not reject (but seems to affirm by actively participating in the discussion cf. 134d-e). This 'partnership' stands in contrast to the musical lover's earlier attempt . . secure the alliance of the

[49] In book 7 of *Republic* Socrates describes the one who is the suitable candidate for philosophy, and at 535c, he talks about the role of 'the love of labor', which will be necessary for the young man to complete 'so much study and practice'. The suggestion is that if the one who is to philosophize is to take up a 'measured amount' of learning, this will mean a lot more learning than the term seems to imply. One might say that in regard to philosophy, the process of learning never terminates.
[50] My emphasis.

philosopher. In something of an 'ironic twist', Socrates rouses the 'un-philosophic' athlete to join him against the self-declared partisan of philosophy to battle over the definition of philosophy.[51]

The musical lover backs down, albeit grudgingly, and to retain some measure of standing he says: 'I would very gladly contend against this one [the athlete], and I know very well that I would be capable of supporting the thesis which I have put forward even if I had put forward one still weaker than this, for he is nothing. But against you, I haven't the slightest desire to seek victory contrary to my opinion'. The musical lover concludes by agreeing that the measured amount produces good condition in human beings. Again, it is worth noting how this remark betrays the musical lover's conception of philosophy, a conception which seems to have more to do with clever speech and argumentative skills than 'much learning', not to say 'love of wisdom'. But putting his claims aside, we have to wonder if the musical lover could have made an even weaker speech the stronger. If Socrates withdrew at this point, it is likely that the musical lover would have pressed his claim – to greater or lesser success. Whether or not the athlete would have cared much for such a 'battle of words' is another question. But Socrates has a moderating effect on the musical lover, at least he now professes he will not continue to argue for the sake of victory alone – at least not against Socrates. Because the musical lover is spirited and has attached his love of honour to the

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[51] In speaking about how the philosopher is often forced to defend philosophy against both the sophist and the man of 'commonsense', Strauss makes a remark uncanny for its pertinence to this dialogue:

> The opposition of these two vices to each other permits the philosopher, even compels him, to fight the one with the other: against the sophistic contempt for "commonsense" he appeals to the truth divined by "commonsense", and against the popular satisfaction with "commonsense" he allies himself with the sophistic doubt of it.

"On A New Interpretation of Plato's Political Philosophy" in *Social Research*. No. 13: 343.

pursuit of wisdom, he is, in a way, forced to submit to the man who has proven he can and may expose his ignorance, painful as it might be.

Socrates next secures the musical lover's agreement that the same is true for food as for learning and exercises (only a measured amount is good), and confides that he sought to 'compel him to agree' that in all things having to do with the body, the measured amount, not much or little, is what is most beneficial[52]. Even if the measured amount differs according to the individual, Socrates' argument reminds us that there is a natural standard (health) which governs all bodily things[53]. There are physical limitations on what the body can do and contain. Thinking about the 'measured amount' of learning, however, raises a question as to whether the same applies to the soul – to which Socrates now turns.

Having secured the musical lover's agreement that in regard to all bodily things only the measured amount is most beneficial, Socrates asks him if he thinks the same is true for the soul: 'Is it the measured amount of things or those without measure [*ametra*][54] which, when administered, are beneficial?' Taking his cue from what was agreed to about the body, the musical lover readily chooses 'the measured'. Socrates goes on to clarify: 'And are the things that can be learned one of the things administered to a soul?' Again, the musical lover agrees. It is not clear that Socrates is talking about philosophy or education generally, but he certainly aims his questions at refuting the musical lover's definition of philosophy

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[52] That the musical lover couldn't really disagree with Socrates highlights the ambiguity of the term 'measured amount'. Because Socrates does not reprise the entire argument, we can only speculate as to what examples he might have used.

[53] As humans, we have no part in creating the standard of good health, but the maintenance of health is something we must actively pursue.

[54] Unmeasured, boundless, immense, incessant; but also meaning immoderate, senseless, unbalanced.

('much learning'). For the musical lover agrees that, in regard to the things learned by the soul, it is the measured amount, not the large amount, which is beneficial. We should note that Socrates' argument only works if the same is true of the soul as of the body, that there is a natural standard governing its good condition, and that there is some way of determining this standard whereby to judge what the measured amount of learnables would be[55]. In this regard, we should point out a subtle change in how Socrates phrases his questions as he transfers from the body to the soul. Initially, they agreed that it was the measured amount, 'not much or *little*', which produces good bodily condition. When speaking of the soul, Socrates suggests it is the measured amount, 'not the *large* amount'[56] which is beneficial: here, Socrates drops his dismissal of the little amount as potentially beneficial. Without making too much of this, we might suggest that this inconspicuous departure alerts us to questions about the validity of using the model of bodily health as an analog for the soul (That Socrates seems to stress 'the large amount' in regard to the soul raises the question of whether or not the soul could partake of certain things 'in excess'). Like the body, the soul may have a natural condition of health, but it seems this condition is far more difficult to ascertain than in the case of the body. Most people are very aware of their bodily needs, and seldom choose not to heed them. The body has clear ways of indicating, say, when it is getting too much or too little water; the same is true of food and exercise. But is there anything similar with the soul? Clearly, we can see that people who are never exposed to

[55] This could be a risky endeavor, as one's psychic health is more valuable (perhaps also more vulnerable) than one's bodily health, thus militating against risky self-experimentation. Cf. *Protagoras* 313c-314.
[56] Both are my emphasis.

systematic learning tend to remain diminished human beings. But as for the other extreme, it is not clear the soul could have too much knowledge, too much exposure to beauty and nobility, or too much virtue.[57]

Socrates next asks the musical lover a set of three questions, each having to do with experts and expertise. First, whom they would 'justly' ask what sort of exercises and foods are measured with regard to the body. Socrates says the three of them agreed that it was a doctor or a trainer (at this point the athlete seems to be actively participating). The second question pertains to the 'sowing of seed': who should be asked how much is the measured amount? They agree that it is the farmer. Thirdly, Socrates asks: 'Whom would we justly ask about the planting and sowing in the soul of the things to be learned, how much and what sort is the measured amount?' To this, apparently, neither of the two rivals makes a response, though as Socrates tells it 'we were all completely at a loss'. It is particularly strange that the musical lover has nothing to say, since he had already deferred to Solon's authority regarding philosophy (of course he was the supposed authority for 'much learning'.) And what about Dionysius? They are, after all, in his school. Do the lovers not think he would know something about the administering of learnables to the soul? Do they think anyone at all possesses such expertise?[58]

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[57] Cf. Aristotle, *Politics* 7.1.

[58] We have no idea who Socrates has in mind, if anyone at all. However, the phrasing of the questions may point to a possibility we are meant to consider. In the first question Socrates asked who would know *what sort* of exercises and foods are measured with regard to the body. In the second question, he asked who would know *how much* is the measured amount of seed to be sown. The third question combines both type and quantity ('how much and what sort is the measured amount'), suggesting the expert in this regard might combine traits analogous to the doctor / trainer and farmer. Noting their respective pertinent qualities, the doctor is able to diagnose sickness in its many varieties, and prescribe cures for the restoration of health. He would also know something about internal and external causes of sickness. The trainer typically begins with healthy bodies and suggests exercises that condition and shape the body with certain ends in mind, ends which accord

V. Aporia 135a

Having noted that he and the two rivals were 'completely at a loss', Socrates confides that he then 'playfully' inquired: 'Are you willing, since we are at a loss, for us to ask these boys here? Or are we perhaps ashamed, as Homer says the suitors were, who didn't deign that there be another who would string the bow?' It is not entirely clear how Socrates intends this to be understood as a playful remark. Is he merely taking some mischievous pleasure in embarrassing both of the rivals (one could imagine the embarrassment the lovers would feel if one of the boys offered a good response)? Indeed, is Socrates altogether serious about this suggestion? He may simply be indicating to the boys that he is aware of their attention, and is not insensitive to how they might be interpreting the discussion.

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with the natural capacities of the given individual (running, swimming or boxing etc.) The farmer's skill consists of knowing how to plant seeds and nurture a variety of crops. He has to know something about soil conditions, and which plants will thrive in various environments – this would include knowledge of weather patterns and seasonal changes. Because the farmer is raising food for himself and others, his art is, in principle, governed by the medical art (but not reducible to it); he has to know what foods are healthy for humans. With these points in mind, we might hazard a provisional sketch of Socrates' elusive educator of souls. He would have to know what constitutes psychic health, and how to diagnose and heal sick souls. He would know the proper conditions for certain types of rearing, how to nurture and care for the young, and be able to differentiate and train souls to various ends according to natural capacity. He would also know how to develop 'strength', 'speed' and 'endurance' in souls and how to discern when psychic exercises would be most beneficial. We should also point out that Socrates' expert would be distinguished from the others in this way: he would have to exemplify personally the value of his advice. Unlike the farmer say, whose crops - which would be the 'evidence' of his ability to offer advice – could be ruined by things out of his control, the expert in cultivating souls would have to be 'cultivated'. The destitute farmer may have a lot of valuable advice to offer other farmers. Conversely, the educator who ruins his soul has lost the only possible testimony to his ability to offer advice on such matters, not to mention the grounds for his doing so. But this still leaves us with a major problem: assuming we are looking for such an advisor, we do not ourselves possess the virtue of soul we covet. How then would we recognize the expert we seek, as his credentials reside in something we have yet to understand? (Is this why Socrates' interlocutors have no response to this question?) One might say that we are, at the very least, better off for having recognized the difficulty of this situation (similar problems occur in *Laches* and *Protagoras*. For a good discussion of the problem of education and locating 'the expert in caring for souls' in *Laches* see R. De Luca's M.A. thesis *Teaching Courage: A Commentary on Plato's Laches* presented to the University of Alberta, Dept. of Political Science 2004 pp. 57-60).

Socrates' Homeric allusion is to the *Odyssey*, and refers to Eurymachos' speech to Penelope just prior to when the disguised Odysseus strings his bow (XXI. 320-329). Now, there may be a 'playful' side to what Socrates is doing with the Homeric reference. If we follow the analogy, Socrates is putting himself, along with the lovers, in the place of the suitors, all of whom could not string the bow. Because the two rivals are suitors of a kind, Socrates' comment could be taken as rather insulting, that both lovers are unworthy of their beloved. But this doesn't seem to work because Socrates suggests that the two boys may themselves have an answer to the question, that they might be able to 'string the bow', as it were. However, the two boys offer no response, and we have to wonder if, in making this playful remark, Socrates is not pointing to himself as the wily Odysseus (who disguises himself to compete with the suitors for possession of his own household). Contrary to his profession of ignorance (we have already seen Socrates feign ignorance in first addressing the athlete), perhaps then, Socrates has something definite in mind, an answer to his own question. But what would Socrates *receive* if he were to meet this challenge? Would it be the affection of the two boys? Perhaps, but there might be more to this. If Socrates' situation is anything like the one Homer has depicted, we have to remember that Odysseus was faced with more than just stringing his bow; *that* he knew he could do. His true dilemma was contriving a plan whereby successfully to remove the suitors from his household, and we have to wonder if there is something analogous in Socrates' situation.

VI. The Argument, Part Two 135ab-137a

Because his playful attempt to prod the rivals to respond apparently left them dispirited (*athumein*) about the argument, Socrates says he tried to pursue the investigation in another way. Shifting from the question of *who* would have expertise of learnables, he asks: 'What sort of things that can be learned do we guess to be especially those which the one philosophizing must learn, since he is not to learn all or even many of them?' We should note that Socrates drops the explicit mention of 'measured amount', but incorporates the gist of what they agreed to earlier in that the one philosophizing would have to learn, not many things, but select kinds of learnables. That is to say, the one philosophizing would not learn indiscriminately, but would seek to learn those things most suited to bringing about the good condition of the soul, presuming, if he is anything like the lover of athletics, good psychic condition is what he most desires.[59]

The musical lover now thinks he has an answer to Socrates' query. He suggests that these learnables would be the 'noblest of things that can be learned', things which would give one the greatest reputation for philosophy. The musical lover goes on to suggest that if one were experienced in all the arts, one would invariably possess such a reputation, but if this is not possible, then experience with the 'noteworthy' arts will suffice. He concludes by adding that one should learn the arts in a way that is 'fitting for the free', which he explains means only learning the

[59] As Bruell notes, this might imply that the one philosophizing is more akin to the lover of athletics than the expert, insofar as his desire for good condition superintends his desire for the expertise in how to bring about good condition. That is, the athlete desires the benefits of athletics, not to be a trainer of athletes (cf. 133e, although, we might add, the lover of athletics might incidentally become competent to train other athletes). *The Roots of Political Philosophy* pg. 96.

part of the art which pertains to the understanding (or judgment) as opposed to involving any manual labour. These last remarks signify the musical lover's incorporation of 'the measured amount' into his definition of philosophizing. It is important to note that his response seems to square with the conventional understanding of gentlemanliness. We might interpret his remarks to mean that the free man (the prospective gentleman) ought to pursue an education befitting his status and one that would of course redound to his honour. Presumably, this education would include becoming familiar with many of the arts: manual, musical, and theoretical. But this kind of learning is to be contrasted with the training of the artisan, who learns his art for the sake of work and wages (manual labour being beneath the status of the liberally educated gentleman).[60] However, it is not clear which of the arts the musical lover has in mind here; that is, which art or arts would best furnish a reputation for wisdom (e.g., would astronomy be included?). In any event, his response to Socrates reveals that the musical lover sees philosophy more as a means to honour and status, than as something that is intrinsically valuable (and we have to wonder how this would work with the notion that philosophy is noble, hence *deserving* of honour[61]).

It seems that for the musical lover, philosophy is a genteel activity, something which a respectable man of leisure might take up as it suits him. In this, the musical lover's opinion is a reflection of his regime; one might say he typifies an attitude toward philosophy which is native to the free men who reside in a

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[60] Cf. *Protagoras* 312b.

[61] The musical lover seems to believe that the appearance of wisdom is indeed something to be coveted by the man who generally desires to be seen as noble – albeit noble in a conventional sense.

democracy[62]. But what is more telling is that the musical lover is satisfied with the *appearance* of wisdom, and seems to falsely presume that the appearance necessarily indicates the reality. This, in turn, is bound up with his desire for honour, and as we see, he has not thought much about the problem implicit in wanting to be *reputed* for wisdom either (how would the many unwise be able to praise him for a quality they themselves do not possess?)[63]. Perhaps this is why the musical lover relies so on the arts, as technical competence is a solid kind of knowledge which is readily assessed and appreciated by ordinary understanding. But while this kind of knowledge may not positively harm the soul, it is not clear that knowing many arts - even noteworthy ones - is the kind of learning which will engender its good condition.

To clarify the musical lover's statement, Socrates asks if he means something like the case of carpentry. The carpenter is common, and his services can be purchased rather cheaply; whereas the first-rate architect is rare; as Socrates says: 'Indeed, there would be few of them even among the Greeks'. Socrates seems to be asking the musical lover if he thinks of the one philosophizing in relation to the artisan as someone like the architect in relation to the carpenter, but this is not necessarily what the musical lover had in mind (He could have been thinking more in terms of someone whose knowledge of the arts is strictly limited to 'theoretical principles', not actual practice. Importantly, *both* the architect and the carpenter are hired technicians, not 'free men'). These two 'knowers' would have a knowledge

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[62] Cf. *Republic* 561d.

[63] Wisdom is a peculiar form of excellence, in that, to be able to recognize it, one must possess it to some to degree. This would stand in contrast to other virtues and goods like courage, moderation and beauty. Cf. note 58.

of carpentry, but the carpenter would be the lower manual labourer (practicing a skill that can be coerced), and the architect would be one who has learned the art of carpentry as, supposedly, befits a free man (according to the analogy). This would seem to mean that what distinguishes the architect is that he knows what good carpentry is, and importantly, he understands the potential of the craft (he knows what is possible and impossible in terms of structural construction). Moreover, the architect's knowledge would exceed the bounds of carpentry; in fact, to be competent, he would have to know something about all of the building trades. His art also combines technical skill with other kinds of knowledge that are not, in themselves, reducible to technical expertise. To be truly 'first rate', the architect requires creative imagination to furnish ideas that would become the basis for plans of novel structures. And he also needs prudence to carry out his plans – to manage effectively the subordinate artisans and to be able to make good decisions 'on the spot' as contingencies emerge[64]. The good architect would have the ability to see a clear relation between the part and the whole; he would have the ability to synthesize essential elements into a synoptic vision. It is the combination of these higher forms of knowledge and imagination with technical expertise which makes the first-rate architect so uncommon. His qualities are not, as the musical lover might suggest, merely the partial learning of each of the arts involved with building.[65]

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[64] The word architect (*architekton*) meaning: 'master builder', or literally, 'ruler of the arts' or more narrowly 'ruler of builders'.

[65] By using this example, Socrates may be offering the musical lover a way to augment his initial position, which, as we've mentioned, is rather problematic. We might add that the higher kinds of knowledge the architect possesses may be more in line with the kind of learning Socrates has in mind for the one who is to philosophize. That is, it hints at two things: a) a natural hierarchy of importance among knowable things; b) an ability to judge lesser knowers. But having begun with

The musical lover grants the relevance of the carpenter-architect example, but does not seem to recognize that its 'utilitarian' character is not consistent with his initial statement about the philosopher. Seemingly aware of the musical lover's lapse in judgement, Socrates immediately challenges his view, asking him if it is not impossible for someone to learn even two individual arts this way, much less many great ones. By way of defending himself, the musical lover clarifies his position:

> Don't take me to be saying, Socrates, that the one philosophizing must know precisely each of the arts, just as he who possesses the art himself, but rather he must know them as is fitting for a free and educated man who is able to follow what is said by the craftsman in a way that distinguishes him from those present and who can himself contribute his judgment, so as always to be reputed most refined and wisest among those who are present when things are said and done about the arts.

This seems a fairly sensible view, which Socrates interprets in a most implausible way, raising the question as to why Socrates seems so intent upon humbling and embarrassing the musical lover. Much of this response follows from what the musical lover had said earlier, but Socrates claims he is still uncertain as to how the musical lover intends his argument to be understood. One thing we might note is that it is difficult to see how the musical lover's conception is deserving of the high praise he had earlier lavished on philosophy. Putting the highest interpretation on his attempted definition, the musical lover may be trying to articulate the importance of knowing enough about the arts for the purposes of political competence and adjudication. A man concerned with politics, a gentleman say, could be reasonably expected to know something about the various trades and

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the idea that philosophy is 'much learning', the inquiry remains 'confined' by a preoccupation with knowledge.

practices found in the city. This ability – which the musical lover might simply conflate with philosophy – would be part of what makes this man dependable and well respected[66].

At any rate, Socrates decides to probe further, shifting focus from the learnables the one philosophizing ought to know to how the musical lover conceives of the philosopher:

> Do I have in mind what sort of man you mean by the philosopher? For you seem to me to mean those who are like the pentathletes in relation to the runners and the wrestlers, in competition. For they too are inferior to those others in their particular events, and are second to them, but are the first among the other athletes and victorious over them.

Socrates interprets this to mean, that according to the pentathlete model, the philosopher is inferior to the artisans who have first-rate knowledge of their respective arts. But the second-rate knowledge of the philosopher is better than all non-artisans in that he has more knowledge of the arts than they do. This second-rate knowledge would set him apart in terms of being reputed for wisdom, but would make the philosopher (as a practitioner of the various arts) subordinate to the artisan in terms of actual usefulness. But again, this is not really what the musical lover had suggested. The analogy itself is not about understanding (which was the musical lover's point initially – that the philosopher has a knowledge of the arts regarding judgement), but about bodily performance, something more akin to manual labour which the musical lover had wanted to set the philosopher above.

We should note that Socrates has again opted for an athletic example to provide a comparison for the musical lover, something which did not previously

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[66] We should emphasize that, in all likelihood Socrates sees through the musical lover's inconsistencies to the sensible position he is trying to articulate, but is unwilling to be a 'midwife' to his thoughts.

work in his interlocutor's favour[67]. The interpretation of the pentathlete example Socrates provides, and which the musical lover approves, is apparently meant to clarify his interlocutor's intention, but the interpretation is misleading. Socrates is right to suggest the pentathlete would not be first if he competed with athletes who specialize in one of the five contests comprising the pentathlon (wrestling, long jump, running, discus, javelin). But, in itself, the pentathlon could be understood as its own form, perhaps a higher form of athletic competition: clearly the pentathlete would have to train in a peculiar fashion to manage his five events – something which would require a distinct form of strategy and set of physical demands (a pentathlete who competes against other pentathletes in a sprint for example, would run the race differently than runners who specialize in sprinting). It would not be misleading to suggest that the victorious pentathlete could be justly hailed as the best 'all around' competitor, and perhaps then most deserving of praise. Certainly, in the eyes of many, the pentathlete would command a great deal of respect. And this may be why the musical lover is happy to agree to Socrates' analogy, suggesting he has offered a 'noble [or 'beautiful'] conception of what has to do with the philosopher.' He favours the idea that the philosopher would be able to 'compete' in many areas – that he is a sort of 'pentathlete of the arts'[68] - but in this, the musical lover is insensitive to the fact the pentathlete model still associates the philosopher with technical knowledge, and in effect, subordinates the philosopher as a knower to the artisan. The philosopher's 'wisdom' would be derivative of the

[67] It would seem to open the way again to involving the athlete, which – interestingly- Socrates does not do. However, the example itself would be of some interest to the athlete, and would, at the very least, keep him attentive to the discussion.

[68] It is worth noting that while the musical lover seems to consider the pentathlete to be noble, in all likelihood, he would not think as much of the 'jack of all trades'.

artisan's expertise, and he would have to be consistently learning from those who are, as the musical lover wishes to insist, beneath him in status. We can see then, that on the musical lover's own terms, this conception of the philosopher is not unequivocally 'noble'. What he seems to find attractive in the analogy is that it is some combination of knowledge and *freedom* which elevates the philosopher above the specialist: 'For he is simply the sort of person who is not enslaved to any matter and who hasn't labored at anything to the point of precision (so as to be deficient in all the other things, as the craftsmen are, because of his concern for this one) but has touched upon every thing to a measured degree.' It is not clear why this sort of freedom from the narrow specialized practice that precision requires sets the philosopher above the artisan. More than anything, the musical lover's statement further betrays how his own sense of what is ignoble (manual labour) is tied to the conventional understanding, which links knowledge with utility. Far from having severed his own understanding from the common view, the musical lover actually seeks to elevate himself in the eyes of 'free men' who themselves tend to have a utilitarian conception of knowledge; a conception drawn from the arts which, after all, are integral to political life as such[69]. And as we have suggested, the musical lover doubtless has some sense that political expertise includes knowledge of how the arts and those who practice them are arranged and judged.

After this reply, Socrates tells his auditor: 'I was eager to know with certainty what he meant, so I inquired of him whether he conceived of those who

[69]All who live within a political community traffic with the arts, if not making their livelihood from financing or practicing some essential and/or coveted trade or service. Cf. *Republic* 369d for one account of how the arts concerned with basic necessities are bound up with the genesis of the city. Compare Aristotle *Politics*, 1.2.

are good (*agathous*) as being useful or useless'. This question is fitting, since the musical lover had agreed that philosophy is something both noble and good, implying that the one philosophizing would also somehow be good and moreover, in the way that skilled artisans are 'good' – that is instrumentally good, providing 'goods and services' that are valued for their own sake. We might notice however, that Socrates' question is especially pertinent in light of the pentathlete, for if a victorious pentathlete is acknowledged noble and *good*, it is as intrinsically so – not in terms of instrumental value[70].

The musical lover chooses the obvious, 'commonsensical' response, affirming the good are useful ('Surely useful, Socrates'). Turning then to the apparent opposite, Socrates suggestively asks: 'Then if the good are useful, are the wretched useless?'[71] Here, we must resort to what we said earlier about the problems of thinking in terms of strict evaluative dichotomies. Regarding the argument, it does not seem to occur to the musical lover that he may be walking into a snare, and he too readily agrees with the suggestion that the wretched are useless. But let us pause briefly and consider what has just been transacted. If the good are useful, the wretched are useless – this is what the musical lover has agreed to. He seems to be saying that the good are always useful, a notion which is directly contravened by the prior example which he had just endorsed. As we have

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[70] Within the context of the discussion, the successful pentathlete would be regarded as noble and good, as the musical lover had earlier affirmed Socrates' suggestion that love of athletics is something both noble and good.

[71] Here I should like to note a few departures I make from Leake's translation, concerning three words in particular. Firstly, I have chosen to translate *poneros* as 'wretched'. Leake's 'wicked' is passable, but 'wretched' is more in line with its primary meaning 'useless' or 'worthless' and also captures the appropriate moral tone, whereas 'wicked' is a little strong. Secondly, I have chosen to translate *mochirous* as 'worthless', which, again, I think is more fitting than Leake's choice of 'evil'. Thirdly, I have chosen to consistently translate *christous* as 'useful', which Leake does, but only until 137c and surrounding, where he changes to 'good', which I reserve for *agathos*.

seen, the musical lover does consider the pentathlete to be good and not in the sense of strict utility. He cannot then, fully believe in what he has agreed to here, or at least, this would be a partial reflection of his views. All this to suggest the musical lover is dimly aware of the distinctions to be made regarding the good, which makes his assertion doubtful, as Socrates undoubtedly realizes.

Socrates next asks his interlocutor whether he regards philosophers as being useful men or not. He tells his auditor that the musical lover agreed[72] in the superlative, though we have to wonder what exactly the musical lover means by 'most useful'. From what we have seen thus far, this assertion would seem rather difficult to defend given that philosophers never learn anything to the point of precision, and do not involve themselves with manual labour. Accordingly, Socrates moves to test the musical lover's claim: 'Come now, let us judge, if what you say is true, where these second best men are also useful to us. For it is plain that the philosopher is inferior to each of those who possess the arts'. To this, the musical lover agrees, and Socrates proceeds to clarify the implications of this statement. He asks the musical lover if he or one of his close friends was ill, would he rather bring the 'second-best' philosopher or the doctor into his household[73] to attempt to restore his health. Perhaps because the example so clearly indicates only one sensible answer, the musical lover tries to evade the broader implication, replying, 'For my part both'. Socrates refuses to accept this equivocation: 'Don't say "both", but tell me which one you would rather have, and first'. By tightening his grip, Socrates forces the musical lover's true opinion to the surface: 'No one

[72] If this implies Socrates 'agreed' also, presumably we require an expanded idea of utility.
[73] If the musical lover understood 'his own position', he would recognize that philosophy could make one a more prudent household manager (cf. 138c).

would dispute this, that he wouldn't rather have the doctor and him first'. Again, by invoking high personal stakes, Socrates strengthens his case: 'In a storm tossed ship, to which one would you rather entrust him and your property, to the pilot or to the philosopher?' Without any equivocation this time, the musical lover admits he would prefer the pilot[74].

Apparently having made his point, Socrates asks the more general question: 'Then is it like this in everything else as well: as long as there is some craftsman, the philosopher is not useful?' The musical lover agrees, but we might ask ourselves if this is true. The musical lover's concession to Socrates only holds if the philosopher's knowledge is strictly limited to the arts, crafts and trades (*technae*). But are there not other kinds of useful knowledge? – especially those by which one can judge the *right* use of all kinds of technical expertise? And do we not encounter various problems and uncertainties where there is no expert craftsman

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[74] This passage reminds us of the image Socrates creates to teach Adeimantus why the decent philosophers are not involved with ruling the city, and why many in the city call the true pilots of the regime 'stargazers' and useless praters (*Republic* 488a-489a). Adeimantus, much like the athlete in our dialogue, has reservations about the value of philosophy. Even though he has followed Socrates' argument for the philosopher's fitness to rule, he looks to his own experience of 'philosophic types' and finds nothing in them which resembles Socrates' philosopher-king – even the decent ones who practice philosophy, he says, 'become useless to the cities'. It is worth drawing attention to *how* Socrates persuades Adeimantus that it is not the decent philosopher's fault if they are deemed useless and wretched by the city. We bring this up because Socrates may be doing something similar with the athlete, who seems to share Adeimantus' point of view. The 'ship of state' image is complex and rewards a close reading. Here, we will limit ourselves to noting that, in itself, the image does *not* address one of Adeimantus' chief concerns: that the true philosopher actually possesses the art of rule (and that there is such an art) – this notion is presupposed by the image. Socrates seems more concerned with easing Adeimantus' concerns over the status of philosophers in the city; he needs to give him an apparently plausible explanation as to why they are neglected by those who have political control. But in making the image 'on the spot' as it were, Socrates shows himself to be an adept psychologist and rhetorician; two skills which, as Adeimantus surely realizes, are significant to the political man's overall ability. Adeimantus is persuaded, not so much by the image itself, but by Socrates' *deed* – his ability to respond adroitly and persuasively to the charge leveled against him. Socrates, as a representative of the philosopher, shows himself to be in possession of skills which, if prevailed upon, could be very useful to the city. For a more extensive and exceedingly valuable treatment of the 'ship of state' image, see Craig *The War Lover*, pgs. 254-260.

to call upon for aid or assistance? Which expert should a young man look to for advice regarding his beloved? Or who should parents seek out for advice regarding the discipline and education of their children?

Putting our own queries and reservations about the argument aside, we note that the musical lover is grudgingly persuaded by Socrates' examples, whereupon Socrates draws the general conclusion: 'And therefore, do we now see that the philosopher is somebody useless for us? For there are surely craftsmen at our disposal. But we have agreed that the good are useful and the worthless are useless.' Socrates confides that the musical lover was 'compelled to agree'. Before moving on to draw out the full consequences of what has been settled thus far, Socrates pauses and asks: 'Then what comes next? Should I ask you, or is it too rude to ask?' Curiously, he now seems concerned about wounding the musical lover's pride (recall, he has noted the youth's sensitivity in this regard, cf. 134b)[75]. Nevertheless, and in a somewhat resigned tone, the musical lover gives him permission to proceed, seemingly aware of what is in store.

Ostensibly to ensure he hasn't drawn any false conclusions, Socrates tells the musical lover that he wants to 'summarize what we've agreed upon'. Here, by using the polite 'we', Socrates includes himself in what is bound to be the inevitable refutation, thus mollifying the sense that he is lording it over his interlocutor. His 'summary' reads as follows: 'We agreed that philosophy is noble and that we ourselves are philosophers; that philosophers are good, the good are useful and the

[75] On the one hand, that Socrates does not want to completely offend the musical lover may indicate that he thinks he has made progress with the young man. On the other hand, because Socrates asks him if it is 'too rude to ask' his question, he reminds the musical lover that he has a personal stake in the argument, and the inevitable refutation.

wretched useless; again, we agreed that philosophers are useless as long as there are craftsmen but that there are always craftsmen'. The musical lover affirms that this is what has been agreed to[76]. Two things stand out here which deserve comment. Socrates never stated that both he and the musical lover were philosophers, nor did he ever mention explicitly that philosophers are good. Strictly speaking, these are two additions to the argument as such, although one could suppose these notions have been implied all along – at least this is how the listeners might perceive Socrates' summary remarks. The fact that the musical lover agrees to the summary, and that no one else interjects, shows that these two additions were indeed assumed by the musical lover, and may have been assumed by the athlete and the two boys (and possibly the anonymous auditor(s)). These subtle additions alert us to certain questions about the summary itself: Why did Socrates pause before proceeding with his refutation? We have to consider the effect this brief digression has on the musical lover and the other listeners. Socrates seems particularly interested in making sure he understands the musical lover's assumptions, both in regard to himself (as philosopher) and the goodness of philosophy. He also wants to bring these assumptions to the fore of the conversation, to remind - not only the musical lover- but everyone listening, what is at stake in the argument. In effect, Socrates wants to prepare his audience for what he has to say next.

[76] We should note that this summary gives the musical lover one last opportunity to change his mind or re-adjust his position.

VII. The Argument, Part Three 137ab-139a

Having 'summarized' the argument thus far, Socrates moves to a complete refutation of the musical lover's response to the question posed at 135a. He begins: 'according to your argument at least, that, if to philosophize consists in their [the ones philosophizing] being knowledgeable about the arts in the way you say, they are wretched and useless as long as there are arts among humans'. In light of the assumptions they have made during the course of the argument, Socrates shows the musical lover to be incapable of backing up his initial praise of philosophy. Even though he extolled philosophy as an exalted activity, he could only frame his definition of philosophy in accordance with commonsense ideas. For him, the desired learnables are the arts, thus knowing is technical understanding and the good of knowledge is utility. And though the musical lover wanted to set the philosopher above the artisan by way of preserving philosophy's nobility, including freedom from manual labour, he found this to be untenable, given his reliance upon reputation and the ordinary understanding of utility. Needless to say, neither of these premises are necessarily adequate. But because the musical lover evinces such a commonplace understanding of what valuable knowledge is, and what the good is generally, we are led to consider the problems involved with defending philosophy to people who share his expectations of what a worthwhile pursuit consists of. Taking some liberty with the dialogue, we might restate Socrates' conclusion in this way: if knowledge is widely understood in terms of technical competence, and the good is generally equated with utility, philosophers will

always *appear* useless (and perhaps wretched) to most people. Somehow, an attempt to defend philosophy to the common understanding will have to cope with the expectations of the common understanding. The musical lover's hopes for such a defence have been dashed, but we should note that Socrates did qualify his response by saying 'according to *your* argument at least',[77] suggesting he might have something else in mind, perhaps another argument which answers to the assumptions (the commonsense expectations) Socrates brought to the fore in his 'summary'.

> Socrates' next statement seems to confirm our suspicions:
>
> > But I suspect my friend, that this isn't so, and that to philosophize isn't to have become serious about the arts nor to live as a busybody, stooping down and learning many things, but rather something else, since I supposed that this was in fact a matter of reproach and that those who have become serious about the arts were called illiberal'.

With a dismissive flourish, then, Socrates denigrates the idea of philosophy having much to do with the arts, or of being much learning simply, suggesting such notions are beneath serious consideration[78]. In seeming to dismiss the arts generally, Socrates implies that whatever he has in mind, it will be something more dignified than any familiar kind of technical expertise. Here, then, he exploits the musical lover's genteel prejudice that expertise in the arts is unbecoming of a liberally educated 'gentleman'.

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[77] Emphasis is mine. Because the musical lover commits the logical fallacy of 'affirming the consequent' Socrates can frame his refutation in the way he does. But the musical lover's errors are his own, and the premises of the argument do not necessarily have to be thrown out in light of Socrates' refutation.

[78] His response addresses a central problem implicit in the musical lover's position, that the philosopher could somehow learn several or even many arts but without actually practicing them, so as to maintain his leisure and freedom.

At this point, Socrates radically alters the focus of their discussion, and solicits the musical lover's help in exploring a very different supposition: 'But we shall know with more certainty whether what I say is true if you answer this: who are those who know how to punish horses correctly? Is it those who make them best or others?' Seemingly un-phased by the abrupt, not to say bizarre shift in direction,[79] the musical lover responds that it is 'those who make them better' who know how to punish horses correctly. Socrates next asks about dogs: 'Don't those know how to make dogs better who also know how to punish them correctly?' The musical lover agrees. Socrates concludes: 'Then the same art makes them best and punishes them correctly'. Again, the musical lover agrees, whereupon Socrates suggestively adds another facet to this two-fold art: 'Is the art which makes them better and punishes them correctly the same as that which also knows the ones who are useful and the ones who are worthless, or is it some other?' The musical lover says it is the same art. Turning from horses and dogs to humans Socrates asks: 'Will you be willing, then, in the case of human beings as well, to agree that the art that makes humans best is the one that both punishes correctly and knows

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[79] As we mentioned earlier, this strange turn of the dialogue is partially responsible for its reputation among scholars as being spurious. I quote from Lamb's Introduction to the *Lovers* as a representative opinion:

> The sudden, impatient manner in which this glimpse of the philosopher is given, and the guise in which he is shown, are not unplatonic: yet, apart from certain details of language, this last section has a clumsy abruptness which suggests that the whole piece may be the work of a skilful imitator, who is successful enough with the dramatic narrative, but cannot rise to the higher levels of Plato's thought and art; and it is to be noted that here the important work of distinguishing the true from the false is not included in the philosopher's business. We should have expected Plato to have either concealed the gaps and loose ends with more playfulness, or to have more ably connected and sustained his treatment of so high and intimate a theme.

Loeb Classical Library, *The Dialogues of Plato* vol. XII, pg 311. Harvard University Press, 1999. I hope the following commentary will help clarify this segment of the dialogue, and in so doing, address some of Professor Lamb's concerns.

thoroughly the ones who are useful and worthless?' 'Certainly', replies the musical lover; agreeing that this one art governs these three matters pertinent to human life.

We should pause here and take stock of what has just been settled between Socrates and his interlocutor. With respect to horses and dogs, those who punish them correctly also know how to make them better, suggesting that punishment can be essential to improvement, in the sense of making them more useful to humans. This same art also 'knows' the ones who are useful and the ones who are worthless. And it is further agreed that the same holds for humans as for dogs and horses. Socrates has, then, introduced a kind of art which comprises three separate but related components: correct punishment, improvement, and knowing the ones who are useful and worthless. It seems the first two components of this art would be subordinate to the third: correct punishment is done for the sake of improvement, but improvement presupposes knowledge of the useful and worthless 'types', this being the standard whereby to assess 'improvement'.

In light of this hierarchy of knowledge, we should notice that the transition from horses and dogs to humans may not be as seamless as Socrates implies. With regard to horses and dogs, the art of improvement is clearly directed by the concern to make these animals serve various human needs and wants: in these cases improvement is virtually defined in terms of utility. The trainer of horses, say, would have to know something about how to discern a horse's natural qualities, and how these qualities can be manipulated in various ways to serve various ends (e.g., whether a given horse is better suited for racing or warfare or simply pulling a wagon). Whatever the 'naturally good' horse might be, its worth is judged from the

perspective of the trainer, and for some human purpose understood by him. But is the process of rearing and improving the same for human beings? And if the correct punishment of a human being means, as Socrates' questions suggest, that the human is improved, by what standard do we assess this improvement? Because he begins this sequence of questions in the way he does, Socrates gives the impression that improvement in usefulness remains the purpose of the correct punishment of human beings. And while one may agree that the best domesticated animals are those most useful to humans, it is by no means clear that the best human is the one who is the most useful; and even if we remain open to this possibility, the question remains, useful to *whom*: himself? other people? the polity as a whole?[80] Moreover, the previous discussion about the arts suggests that one can and should determine and *rank* usefulness among human beings. As we have seen, many craftsmen are very useful; indeed some provide services and products which are fundamental to human survival, others contribute to 'living well', whereas still others may cater to frivolous desires. But are any of these craftsmen *per se* also to be regarded as the best human beings simply? Socrates' denigration of technical pursuits as 'illiberal' seems to imply that they are not to be so regarded. It might be true to suggest that the 'art which makes humans best is the one that both punishes correctly and knows thoroughly the ones who are useful and worthless'. But this criterion is incomplete. Socrates' statement points beyond itself to the difficult question of determining who the best human being is simply, and whether or not we can allot value or rank strictly in terms of utility. And if so, to what use or purpose.

[80] We should also note that if the improvement of humans was somehow like the domestication of animals, the example would suggest a massive gulf separating the trainer and his subject – something which further complicates Socrates' transition from the animal to the human realm.

Might we have to expand our understanding of usefulness in light of some higher conception of the human good, something intrinsically valuable, an end not a means? Briefly alluding to the profoundly difficult nature of these questions suffices to indicate that the notion of correct punishment and the improvement of human beings is far more complicated than Socrates' animal-training analogies suggest.

Another thing to be noted before proceeding is that Socrates' questions concerning the art of improvement reveal his analysis to be conspicuously one-sided, hence inadequate. He introduces this art in terms of punishment alone; both he and the musical lover ignore completely rewards or rewarding as something essential to the art in question. Thinking back for a moment to the horse trainer example, one can readily see that the successful rearing of any type of domesticated horse requires much more than punishment. Simply said, the trainer has to use a judicious combination of 'sticks and carrots' to achieve the desired result: he has to punish the horse to discourage unruly behaviour, but he must also reward the horse to encourage other types of behaviour and to urge it to maintain a favourable disposition. Of course, each individual horse will require a different mix of punishment and reward, and it is the mark of a good horse trainer to know when and how to apply the 'measured amount' of the appropriate kind. Knowing how to employ this regimen is precisely what an *art* of improvement would consist of. The horse trainer would have certain 'rules of thumb' he has learned from others or has gleaned from experience, but his art (rules or guidelines) must be flexible in that he has to cope with and adapt to the differences each horse manifests in various

circumstances[81]. If something similar characterizes the art of improving humans, we are again faced with the issue of knowing what constitutes the good human being, but in addition, there is the problem of knowing the range and potential of diverse human types – a diversity which may far exceed that of any other animal, and is of fundamental importance for the proper 'division of labour' that characterizes a well-ordered polity.

Socrates' next questions alert us to some of the concerns we have raised above: 'Then if there is some art which is applicable to one it is also applicable to many, and if there is one applicable to many it also is applicable to one?' 'Yes', replies the musical lover. Socrates asks if this is the case with 'horses and all the others?' Again, the musical lover answers affirmatively. Setting aside horses and dogs, the problem here becomes clearest when we consider this question in light of human beings. On the one hand, we have suggested that an art of human improvement would have to be applicable to several more or less distinct types of humans. But on the other hand, the sheer range of human diversity – perhaps including qualitative differences (e.g., of sex, talent, strength, interests, dominant desires) – complicates the idea that the art applicable to one individual can necessarily be applied likewise to many. What seems clear is that, because of human differences, the punishment that would improve a given individual, if it is to be successful, has to be undertaken by a punisher-improver who has knowledge of both the individual (his natural potential and previous history) and what would be in the best interest of both him and the polity in which he resides. These requirements

[81] All of our examples have dealt with horses, but we should note that dogs are notoriously sensitive to both praise and scolding.

make the idea of correct punishment exceedingly difficult to realize, and in the optimum case, restrict it to an individual 'one-on-one' basis.

Turning from strictly individual punishment and improvement to its political counterpart, Socrates asks: 'What, then, is the science that correctly punishes the unrestrained and lawbreakers in the cities? Isn't it the judicial?' The musical lover agrees that it is. Socrates next asks: 'Do you call any science justice other than this one?' 'None but this one', replies the musical lover. 'Then don't they know those who are useful and worthless by the same [science] as that by which they punish correctly?' The musical lover agrees. Socrates then asks: 'And he who knows one will also know many? And he who is ignorant of many is also ignorant of one?' To both questions the musical lover answers 'yes'.

This transition to the political realm amounts to Socrates equating the initial art of 'correct punishment/improvement/knowing the useful and wretched' with what he now calls the 'judicial science', or 'science of justice'. In regard to the original version, we noted some of the major difficulties which significantly complicate its application; and from these points we alluded to further difficulties which would make the precise application of this art impracticable on a wider scale. It is important to note that here, in his questions about the correct punishment in the cities, Socrates omits explicit mention of *improvement*, which subtly confirms his awareness of the difficulties we have indicated above. Socrates asks about the science which correctly punishes 'the unrestrained and lawbreakers in the city'. The question itself suggests what the city *as city* must be primarily concerned with: the integrity of the laws and the preservation of order. The implication is that the

correct punishment in the city differs somewhat from correct punishment simply. The city punishes offenders according to its laws, and because of the general or universal character of law, punishment administered by the city may not always be appropriate to the particular case of the individual (one might consider Socrates' trial in this regard). Given certain political exigencies, the city must be concerned with more than the effect on the individual punished; it has to consider public psychology in regard to the perceived expedition of justice, and will use punishment to deter other potential lawbreakers. Furthermore, the city has as its end its own self-preservation; this is a collective good, and from the communal perspective, it is an end to which the good of every individual is subordinate. This hierarchy of goods complicates the city's relationship to the improvement of the individual; it will suffice to note that what the city requires in terms of duty, law-abidingness, piety and moral commitment is rarely congruent with the *perfection* of the individual, though in decent regimes it would generally contribute to the 'improvement' of most people, as these are aspects of culture or cultivation that are integral to the general elevation of human beings. We are alerted to similar concerns when we think about the somewhat differing standards used by different cities to determine who the valuable and who the worthless humans are. In each case, the civic standard is drawn from the laws, conventions, traditional beliefs and precedents; a standard which tends to narrow the human good simply to utility, and may be more or less aligned with the true natural standard of human improvement.

We should note that Socrates chose to describe correct punishment in the cities as a science (*episteme*) as opposed to an art (*techne*). Both of these terms

imply knowledge of some kind, but whereas art is flexible in its application, science is knowledge according to universal principles. By definition, then, it is something exact and fixed, *not* flexible. Now, the distinction Socrates has implicitly introduced is somewhat complicated. On the one hand, Socrates may be referring to a science of justice in the sense of the rigorous study of what the principles of justice are and how these principles pertain to various aspects of human life. And it would be fair to say, as Socrates does, that this science 'knows' the ones who deserve punishment; but it does so only in the abstract. It would include, for example, knowledge of the criteria whereby someone is denominated 'valuable' as opposed to 'worthless'. This 'science' would be more like jurisprudence, knowledge of the laws and their correct application, and may be more or less informed by knowledge of the true principles of justice (assuming there are such principles). And much as the art of improvement includes more than knowledge of correct punishment – that is, it includes knowledge of correct rewards - so too must a science of justice (e.g., knowledge of correct distribution of honour and wealth). That said, the *science* of justice in the cities differs from the *art* of correct punishment in that the former must, in all cases, speak consistently and universally. Moreover, the art of correct punishment has as its end the improvement of the individual, whereas the city has, as we have seen, other concerns it must consider in regard to the application of the law. We can appreciate, then, the city's vested interest in preserving the appearance of having an authoritative claim on justice and just punishment – a judicial science if you will. But while Socrates seems to be conflating the two facets of this 'part art, part science' (the individual application,

and the explicitly political application), he has subtly prompted us to reflect upon the differences between the needs of the city (in terms of punishment), and what true or correct punishment would consist of were the sole concern that of making a given individual the best he could be. This, in itself, raises questions about the *unity* of this art-science. We might say that the supposed 'oneness' Socrates' questions imply, and of which the musical lover seems persuaded, is subverted by the difference between the common good of the city and the personal good of the individual – a difference brought into stark relief when we realize that correct punishment for the sake of improvement is not altogether possible in the city, even 'in principle'.

Having introduced the political counterpart to the punishment side of the improvement art, Socrates returns to the individual, beginning with questions pertaining to certain animals, two of which he has already spoken of: 'If then, one were a horse and were ignorant of the useful and wretched horses, would one also be ignorant of oneself, of what sort one is?' The musical lover answers affirmatively. Socrates adds a second, seemingly redundant example: 'And if one were an ox and were ignorant of the wretched and useful ones, would one also be ignorant of himself, of what sort one is?' 'Yes', responds the musical lover. Thirdly: 'And so too if one were a dog?' Socrates tells his auditor that the musical lover agreed. 'What then? When one who is a human being is ignorant of the useful and worthless human beings, isn't he ignorant of himself, as to whether he is useful or wretched, since he is himself also a human being?' Again, Socrates tells his auditor the musical lover 'conceded this' too.

Initially, the animal examples were introduced in regard to the existence of an art of punishment for the sake of improvement which requires knowing the ones who are useful and wretched. Now, the question is concerned solely with the ruling part of this multi-faceted art (knowledge of useful and wretched). But as far as we know, horses and dogs have no capacity to know themselves, and do not consider other horses and dogs in terms of 'useful' and 'wretched', lacking the means to evaluate consciously other beings like themselves. However, what seems like ridiculous anthropomorphizing may be Socrates' way of alerting us to the crux of the issue here: because humans possess self-consciousness, they are endowed with an intrinsic value, a value which is to be differentiated from the merely instrumental value of domesticated animals[82]. Only human beings can know themselves, and self-consciously improve themselves in light of how they evaluate both themselves and others. But Socrates' questions point to a problem concerning the relation of self-knowledge to knowledge of human nature generally. If humans are significantly diverse, is it possible for one 'type' to know another? Does 'knowing one' necessarily mean one will also 'know many', particularly when the other possesses different traits or qualities? To borrow Socrates' terms: can the worthless man have an adequate understanding of the useful man? Conversely, is it possible

[82] The fact that Socrates uses three examples where one, not to say two, would have been sufficient, is a curiosity worthy of note. In addition to the horse and dog, Socrates introduces the ox, centering it between the other two examples. The ox itself is the epitome of domesticated beasts, as it is almost always castrated and used mainly for food or as a draught animal. We might suggest that by introducing the ox Socrates draws our attention in two seemingly contrary directions. On the one hand, the ox example serves to contrast brute domesticity to human self-consciousness and the potential for freedom this might entail. On the other hand the ox adds more range and variety to Socrates' examples, alerting us to the diverse roles or functions these animals satisfy. We have to ask whether Socrates is hinting at a parallel in the human realm: perhaps the city encourages a 'domestication' of sorts, as it requires almost the entirety of its population to work according to the division of labor foundational to its existence.

for the useful man to know the wretched? Or to consider the case supposedly at the centre of this discussion: what is required to understand, truly and fully, the philosopher? Would a typical craftsman, for example, understand him? If not, wouldn't his self-knowledge be curtailed by the range of human diversity he *is* able to comprehend? What seems clear is that one's ability to understand oneself, one's 'type', or 'what sort one is', hence one's own good, or one's value, is bound up with one's capacity to understand human excellence simply, as being wrong about the latter will consequently entail a skewed self-evaluation[83].

Socrates goes on to emphasize further the importance of self-knowledge by linking it with two cardinal virtues. Proceeding on the granted mutual connection between ignorance of others and self-ignorance, he asks the musical lover: 'And is to be ignorant of oneself to be moderate (or, 'sensible'; *sophronein*) or not to be moderate?' 'Not to be moderate'. Socrates then asks suggestively: 'Then to know oneself is to be moderate?' 'Yes, I say', affirms the musical lover. That established, Socrates turns to interpret one of the famous inscriptions at Delphi: 'It looks, then, as if this is what the writing in Delphi exhorts: to practice moderation and justice.' 'So it seems', is the reply.

Even if he has reservations about the argument, the musical lover is nevertheless willing to agree to Socrates suggestions, several of which are embedded in his leading questions. It does not seem the musical lover fully understands what he is affirming (a fact Socrates does understand and exploits), and

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[83] The problem of the mutual relation between self-knowledge and knowledge of others is further complicated both by most people's natural tendency to want to think well of themselves (manifesting our natural admiration of the noble), and their inclination to resent their 'betters'. The former often reflects a higher, more dignified side of ourselves, while the latter often betrays the common 'slavishness' of human nature.

so we have to wonder if he is being misled. Socrates, relying on both the literal meaning of *sophrosune* as 'sensible' and common opinion concerning what one must be sensible *about*,[84] easily connects self-knowledge to the virtues of moderation and justice. But the ligatures he seems to establish are certainly not self-evidently necessary. Beginning with the first question, it seems the musical lover is right to agree that being ignorant of oneself (whether or not this equates with knowing if one is useful or wretched) is not to be moderate. Though one might concede that, even in ignorance, a person could occasionally be 'accidentally moderate', but this state, being transitory, would not amount to being moderate in the sense of virtue (since by virtue we mean some 'appropriate measure' of *self-conscious* self-control). Overcoming self-ignorance then would be the first step towards *becoming* moderate – a step which also requires knowledge of what qualifies as 'moderate behaviour'. But what about Socrates' reversal, which the musical lover affirms: does knowing oneself necessarily mean that one is moderate? First of all, Socrates' argument rests on the logical fallacy of 'denying the antecedent'[85], so we have good reason to be wary. However, depending on how we

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[84] The transition between the two definitions of *sophrosune* – soundness of mind, and the virtue of moderation – is clear when one considers that 'being sensible' requires a good measure of self-control, particularly, control of the appetitive desires. The word itself can be loosely translated as 'temperance', 'chastity', 'sobriety', and later becomes the basis for the Latin 'temperantia' and 'modestia' (Liddel & Scott Intermediate Greek lexicon).

[85] The ignorant are immoderate; X is not ignorant; therefore (fallaciously concluding) X is not immoderate (X is moderate). In addition to this, there have been two other notable examples of formal logical fallacies in the dialogue. At 136b Socrates 'denies the antecedent', which contributes to the initial 'refutation' of the musical lover. There, Socrates conflates the good with the useful, and then asks if the wicked are useless. The musical lover agrees thus affirming the fallacy (if X is good, X is useful; X is not good; therefore X is not useful). Socrates utilizes this at 137b, where he 'affirms the consequent' based on the previous fallacy (the wicked are useless, Philosophers are useless; therefore philosophers are wicked). That three glaring fallacies occur over such a short discussion is curious. Socrates seems to be, in part, 'testing' the musical lover's aptitude for argument, in particular his sensitivity to logical correctness. In allowing his interlocutor to make certain mistakes, Socrates can discern the musical lover's 'educability', and gauge his remarks

interpret this claim, we might find some truth in what Socrates has suggested. Clearly, if one truly knows that one is moderate, one would have to know something about what constitutes 'moderate behaviour'. But we might suggest that truly understanding this for oneself begins with reflecting on one's *experience* (recall what was said about the 'measured amount' of exercise). Self-knowledge and moderation are connected in that one must become aware of one's passions and desires to realize what self-control requires. What is interesting is how often we lose sight of how certain appetites or desires dominate our lives, and how, when we become aware of the fact, we find we are better able to resist them (this is also true of the passions – often when we are in the throes of anger and we become self-conscious of our emotive state, we gain a 'reflective distance' on ourselves and the passion relaxes its hold). There is truth to the common 'self-help' cliché, that the first step to overcoming a dominant desire is acknowledging one's subservience to it and that this lack of self-restraint is a problem. We might say that knowing oneself - knowing what is involved with controlling one's desires and passions - is, then, the only conceivable basis for moderation. To be sure, it is not certain Socrates has this kind of argument in mind. He is, however, apparently content to leave his auditors with the impression that this conclusion is simply true, and what is more, he proceeds to 'sanctify' the significance of self-knowledge by telling them that the writing in Delphi exhorts humans to 'practice moderation and justice'[86].

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accordingly. In connection, the fact that Socrates' 'invalid' arguments are 'psychologically persuasive' to the musical lover attests to Socrates ability to divine the nature of his interlocutor and use his rhetorical skill to manipulate the conversation.

[86] Although it is unsaid, we presume Socrates is referring to the Delphic injunction 'Know Thyself'. But because he has connected self-knowledge to moderation he may also be referring to the other famous maxim 'Nothing In Excess', since both maxims are pertinent.

We have given one possible argument for connecting self-knowledge to moderation, but it is not clear what licences Socrates' inclusion of justice as part of his version of the Delphic exhortation. To explain this, we might think back to how Socrates introduced justice into the conversation. Initially, he suggested justice is the 'science' of correct punishment in the cities, and this science also knows the 'the ones who are useful and worthless'. Self-knowledge was also introduced in a similar way – that one needs to know others, the useful and the worthless, in order to know, in turn, whether one is useful or worthless. Since knowing oneself, then, requires knowing others and assessing their qualities, one would thereby be in the only 'legitimate' position to know how to improve them, which (in turn) might entail the *just* application of punishment. In a sense, then, knowing oneself *is* to practice justice, and if something like our earlier argument holds, also to practice moderation. Of course, there is also a 'practical' connection between these two virtues – something which Socrates might also have in mind here. On the face of it, moderation and justice can look very similar, to the point that it becomes a serious question of how to distinguish them[87]. One reason for this is that both are often manifested by the same person. Indeed, the one may be a prerequisite for the other. Consider the moderate man and the immoderate man; the moderate man is not prone to indulging his desires to an excessive degree, something which spares him from much of, or even most of, what we might call unjust behaviour. On the other

[87] In Book IV of *Republic*, justice and moderation are defined in a similar fashion in that both are virtues that belong to the whole (the city and man) as opposed to being found in one of the parts. We should also note that, in contrast to moderation – which Socrates readily descried – both he and Glaucon had to 'beat the bushes' to root justice out. In terms of distinguishing the two virtues politically, moderation is agreement between the classes concerning who the ruler is, whereas justice concerns who ought to rule.

hand, the immoderate man is far more likely to commit injustice in order to procure the objects of his desires. This is not to suggest that the moderate man, in virtue of being moderate, is just. After all, this would require knowledge of what is truly just (one can imagine conventionally moderate and pious Athenians being amongst those who voted to convict Socrates). However, the self-control he manifests is more akin to justice, if not a psychic pre-requisite for being so.

Still, however *we* attempt to make sense of Socrates' leading questions, it is important to recognize that the musical lover does not seem to share our understanding of what Socrates' remarks are pointing toward. In all likelihood, the musical lover takes Socrates to be connecting self-knowledge with moderation and justice understood in the conventionally respectable sense – virtues upheld by the community and its traditional moral teachings. We have to keep in mind the effect this sequence of brief questions might be having on the musical lover and the other listeners. In the first place, it is clear Socrates is not offering 'philosophically' adequate arguments to establish the conclusions he elicits. Rather, the 'loaded' character of these questions is part of a rhetorical effort, intended to create a specific impression (the fact that we have isolated certain difficulties with what Socrates' irony has implied, but not actually said, further substantiates their rhetorical nature). However, this does not mean that what he says is bereft of all validity. As we have seen, there may be a legitimate way to see some truth in what Socrates is suggesting, by filling in the reasoning he omits and/or by clarifying the connections he seems to establish.

Socrates, having effectively blurred the distinction between moderation and justice and then ratifying this conflation with Delphic authority, turns to connect what he has said about virtue and self-knowledge to an art of politics: 'And by this same [science presumably] do we also know how to punish correctly?' The musical lover answers affirmatively. 'Then isn't it justice by which we know how to punish correctly and moderation by which we know how to know thoroughly both oneself and others?' Again, the musical lover agrees: 'It looks like it'. Socrates suggestively asks: 'Then both justice and moderation are the same thing?' 'It appears so'. Turning back to the city, Socrates remarks: 'And indeed, it is thus that the cities are well managed: whenever those who do injustice pay the penalty'[88]. The musical lover affirms this. Socrates concludes: 'And so this is also the political art', adding that the musical lover 'concurred'.

In the first of his five suggestions, Socrates asks if by this 'same [science] do we also know how to punish correctly?' It seems he is referring to the knowledge governing the practice of moderation and justice, and conflating this with what he had said about the 'judicial science'. From this, Socrates re-states his definition of justice (that 'by which we know how to punish correctly') and then offers a definition of moderation (that 'by which we know how to know thoroughly both oneself and others'). As we mentioned above, this does, in a sense, follow from what Socrates has said, even if we might have some reservations about completely affirming its validity. Socrates next explicitly conflates justice and moderation, suggesting they are 'the same thing', about which the musical lover seems a bit wary, but nevertheless agrees. We, nonetheless, need to ask what, if

[88] Note again the absence of any reference to the just distribution of good things.

anything, licenses this remark. To hazard one possibility, we look to how Socrates has 'defined' the two virtues. Both justice and moderation were introduced as kinds of knowledge: justice is knowledge of correct punishment, and moderation knowledge of oneself and others. And as we have noted earlier in regard to Socrates' version of the Delphic command, both virtues or kinds of knowledge are practically related. By suggesting they are the very same thing[89], however, Socrates seems to imply that both virtues reduce simply to knowledge, which reminds us of the intriguing but vexing Socratic adage: 'Virtue is Knowledge'. Again, Socrates provides no explicit argument to establish this 'claim' – that both justice and moderation are the same thing - which leaves us to consider its rhetorical effect. Here, it will suffice to note that Socrates has 'elevated' knowledge to pre-eminence by suggesting it is the ground of two cardinal virtues, both being related somehow to the 'judicial science' and the 'political art'. One might say that knowledge, perhaps especially self-knowledge of the highest kind of person, is the linchpin of this art; clearly whatever 'oneness' Socrates has established, it is because of knowledge that he is able to tie all of its components together.

Moving to explicitly political matters, Socrates states, 'it is thus that the cities are well managed: whenever those who do injustice pay the penalty'. Notice that Socrates only refers to punitive measures; again, he has neglected to mention the art of improvement, which importantly would entail an 'art' of rewarding[90]. As

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[89] On the connection between justice and moderation Bruell suggests 'Since justice, the art of punishing correctly, has to do principally with the improvement of others, and is, at any rate, only what *brings* a soul into good condition, I surmise that moderation, that is, self-knowledge, is this good condition itself.'
Roots of Political Philosophy pg. 106.

[90] Though he has not excluded it. What Socrates says concerning the good management of the city might be true, but it is incomplete.

in the case of horses, cities are not 'well managed' by punitive justice alone; there are many other things involved, including the distribution of non-sharable goods and a public structure of honour which *encourages* and rewards salutary behaviour. Whether or not this 'science' of punishment or the political form of rewarding is in strict alignment with the true standard of individual improvement is, as we've mentioned, questionable. But because Socrates omits important considerations in regard to the management of the city, the art or science he has introduced to the musical lover is incomplete, hence as an account of 'the political art', it is somewhat misleading.

Continuing to elaborate the political side of this art, Socrates asks the musical lover: 'And what about when one man correctly manages a city? Isn't his name tyrant and king?' 'Yes, I say.' Having suggested two morally quite distinct names for this ostensibly single form of political management, Socrates asks: 'Then he manages it by the kingly and tyrannic art?'[91] Without noting the possibility of any false conflation, the musical lover agrees: 'Just so.' Now suggesting these are actually two arts, Socrates includes them with what has preceded: 'And these are the same arts as the former ones?' 'They appear to be'. Socrates then turns to another form of rule: 'What about when one man manages a household correctly by himself? What name is he given? Is it not household manager and master?' 'Yes'. 'Then would this one too manage the household well by justice or by some other

[91] Strangely, Socrates seems to be referring to one ruler as both kingly and tyrannic, which raises interesting questions – are these simply the same art or different arts or different sides to one 'art of rule' which allows the ruler to know when he ought to be 'kingly' and when 'tyrannical'. Socrates suggestive remark may tie in with self-knowledge, self-improvement and self-punishment as self-mastery requires different forms of rule: the irrational drives need to be ruled tyrannically, while we can reason with other parts of the soul. Cf. Nietzsche's *Daybreak*, especially aphorism 109 for an interesting and characteristically provocative treatment of this issue.

art?' 'By justice'. Socrates concludes with an apparent synthesis: 'It looks as if they are the same thing, then, a king, a tyrant, a statesman[92], a household manager, a master, a moderate man, a just one. And it is one art that is kingly, tyrannic, political, masterful, pertaining to household management, justice, moderation.' Accepting this remarkable synthesis, the musical lover responds: 'It appears to be that way'.

Socrates' procedure in this last sequence of questions is suspicious, especially if taken to exemplify 'philosophical' rather than 'sophistical' argument. Obviously, he has glossed some very important distinctions, and consequently, avoided some very significant questions (his 'arguments' up to this point have been notably incomplete, not to say deliberately inadequate). But as we mentioned earlier, we have to balance our 'analytic' concerns with an examination of the overall rhetorical effect. Socrates' final statement incorporates seven seemingly distinct facets into one art: three of these are overtly political (king, tyrant, statesman); two pertain to the household or private sphere (household manager, master); two are virtues and pertain to the individual (justice, moderation). Following from what went before, these last two would also include self-knowledge and the art of punishment for the sake of improvement as well as the 'judicial science'. Without dismissing the possibility that there is a deeper unity here, the range of this one art covers much of what could potentially interest the young musical lover, not to mention his rival and the two boys, possibly also the

[92] Here we make another departure from Leake's translation, albeit a minor one. For the word *politikos*, Leake has chosen to use 'political man', which is passable, but 'statesman' or even 'politician' would have been better (because *all* men are 'political'). Here, we will use 'statesman' for *politikos*, since that is how Plato's dialogue of the same name is most often translated.

anonymous auditor. It would not be misleading to suggest that Socrates has keyed his remarks to the taste of his audience, and if they are at all persuaded by what he has said, little else would seem as significant as this 'one' art. One might ask: what could be *more* worth their while to pursue?

Socrates continues:

> Then if it is shameful for the philosopher, when a doctor says some thing about the sick, neither to be able to follow what is said nor to contribute anything to what is said or done, and likewise whenever any other of the craftsmen is involved, is it not shameful, when a judge or a king or any other of those we've just now gone through is involved, for him neither to be able to follow nor to contribute concerning these things? (with this, Socrates effectively concedes what the musical lover had said at 135d).

The musical lover responds: 'How is it not shameful, Socrates, to have nothing to contribute especially with regard to such great matters?' Going back to his version of the musical lover's philosopher, Socrates adds pointedly:

> So then, which shall we say: that he should be a pentathlete and second best about these things too and that the philosopher, taking second place in all of this, is indeed good for nothing as long as one of them is available? Or that, first, he ought not to entrust his own household to another nor have second place in this but rather sit in judgement and punish correctly himself if his household is to be well managed?

Socrates says the musical lover 'conceded this to me'. 'Next, presumably, if his friends entrust matters for arbitration to him, or if the city commands him to decide or judge some judicial matter, is it shameful, comrade, to come to light as second or third in these affairs, rather than to lead?' 'It seems so to me'. Socrates finishes this sequence by re-stating his initial suspicion (137b): 'Therefore, you best one, to philosophize is far from being much learning and preoccupation with the arts.' He concludes by telling his auditor, 'On my saying these things, the wise one, who was

ashamed at what he had said earlier, was silent, but the ignorant one said that it was so, and the others praised what had been said'.

In these last remarks, which we might call the second refutation of the musical lover's position, Socrates clearly exploits the young man's sense of shame to cement the conclusions he has drawn. He begins by returning to the idea of the philosopher having second-rate knowledge and asks leadingly: *if* it is shameful for the one philosophizing to be subordinate to the doctor or any of the craftsmen, is it not shameful – implying it is more shameful – to be second-rate to the judge or king. Predictably, the musical lover is ready to agree with what has been implied. Notice however, that it was never said that it would be positively shameful for the philosopher if he proved to have second-rate knowledge of the arts. At most, he would thereby be 'not noble'. And according to Socrates' first refutation of the musical lover, it would seem that it is *not shameful* to have nothing to contribute to the doctor or any of the craftsmen. If this is right, then it is not actually *more shameful* to have nothing to contribute to the judge or the king (notice, Socrates does not mention the tyrant). Socrates capitalizes on the musical lover's attachment to honour and his sense of shame (not on his capacity for rational argument) to encourage him to eschew his former position and accept the alternative 'argument' Socrates has just offered. In doing so, he focuses the musical lover's conception of the noble by overtly connecting it to the political realm, a direction the young man might have already been heading.

But Socrates does not simply hand the musical lover an altogether different opinion. What we see in this last section is that Socrates has chosen to augment the

musical lover's definition of philosophy; importantly, he offers a modified version which preserves some of the musical lover's main assumptions. Three of these are: that the one philosophizing should learn 'the noblest of things that can be learned'; that these learnables should have something to do with the arts; and that these learnables should be useful. Where the musical lover failed to provide examples of 'noteworthy arts' Socrates offers him the impressive 'seven-fold art' in response. But in contrast to the musical lover's initial argument (135b), the 'art' Socrates offers is not simply choice worthy because it provides a reputation for wisdom. As Socrates presents it, the art, if learned properly, would be supremely useful as it pertains to the management of many important human affairs, both public and private (we should notice that even though Socrates refers to what he has offered as an *art*, its usefulness spans beyond the conventional domain of *techne*). And while the musical lover, perhaps preoccupied with political leadership, may find such matters to be endowed with noble significance ('such great matters') – in fact, Socrates seems to rely on his doing so - Socrates does not mention the noble to buttress his position. Instead, Socrates attaches shame to being second or third (being useless) in areas where the musical lover's self-interest (or that of his friends or city) is clearly invested[93]. To the musical lover at least, what Socrates offers seems to match the expectations he could not defend. That is, the learning of this art would make the one who is going to philosophize noble and good (good in the

[93] Recalling what we said earlier about the false opposition between nobility and shame, it is not clear that being first rate in these matters would necessarily make one noble. Having said that, Socrates seems to allow or even encourage the musical lover to make this assumption based on his suggesting that to be second rate in these affairs would be shameful.

sense of useful), and by virtue of being useful or being 'first place', he would incidentally enjoy a reputation for wisdom.

Still, we must explain why Socrates has chosen to offer his alternative in the form of an art, something which might seem strange in light of his final remark – 'that to philosophize is far from being much learning and preoccupation with the arts'. On the one hand it seems as if Socrates is caught in a contradiction, given the manifold variety of things his art covers. But Socrates has obviated this objection by stressing the oneness of the art and the underlying unity of its various components. In so doing, he has also obviated the objection he levelled against the musical lover, that it might be impossible to learn two *individual* arts in the way he had suggested, much less many great ones (135cd). With this, Socrates curbs the musical lover's attachment to indiscriminate learning (*polymathein*), while simultaneously endorsing the notion that the one who is to philosophize must learn many things[94](here, this includes the recognition of a hierarchy of learnable things which is rank-ordered according to self-interest).

Having said this, there are more questions to consider here: why is Socrates emphatic about these learnables being an art? Why does he need to use the notion of 'art' at all? To see this, we need to review a couple of things raised earlier in our commentary on the dialogue. First, we have to remember that the two rivals were perplexed by Socrates' question about the advisor who has expertise regarding 'the planting and sowing in the soul of the things to be learned, how much and what sort is the measured amount'. They were on solid ground when asked about the doctor, trainer and farmer – all discernable experts in relation to discernable arts. But their

[94] That the one philosophizing must be a lover of learning, cf. *Republic* 475c-d.

'aporia' in regard to the third question signifies the difficulty they have understanding knowledge regarding the soul without being able to relate it to a familiar art, or to 'art' at all. Secondly, we have to remember the related issue of how the musical lover chose to continue the discussion after the aporetic impasse. Socrates had asked about what the one philosophizing must learn, and the musical lover suggested that he must learn the 'noteworthy' arts. This suggests that he cannot conceive of philosophizing as an activity apart from some reference to the acquisition of positive knowledge. Moreover, he had proved throughout to have a common conception of what knowledge is, a conception which equates knowledge with technical skill or competence. Responding generally to what he has learned about his interlocutors, Socrates offers his final alternative in the form of an art because their comprehension level sets the upper limit, or places a ceiling on the conversation. For most of the discussion, they have talked about philosophy in relation to knowledge, and Socrates knows the musical lover, for example, will more readily grasp or relate to the idea of an art, as opposed to introducing him to other forms of knowledge. But there are additional consequences to this Socrates might have considered. If the musical lover is persuaded by Socrates, he will now think that all of the domains Socrates touched on are governed by knowable rules or principles. This, in turn, could have a moderating effect on the musical lover, as he realizes that it requires knowledge and not just clever speech to 'come first' in these matters. All told, Socrates exposes the musical lover's ignorance, shames him and moderates his presumptuousness. By having him accept this 'seven-fold-art', and assume that this is what the one philosophizing must learn, Socrates suggests a

salutary path the young man might follow if he wants to pursue philosophy in the future (he also offers him and the listeners a way to criticize others who would espouse knowledge of what it is to philosophize). Last, but by no means least, we have to remember the athlete's accusation, that philosophizing is nonsense or useless prattle. If the athlete is persuaded by Socrates that the one who is to philosophize must learn this 'one' art, his opinion about the philosopher's uselessness will almost certainly have been revised. It is unlikely that Socrates would have been able to effect this change had he chosen to discuss his alternative without recourse to the idea of art or skill[95]. Perhaps even more than the musical lover, the athlete might appreciate the value or the usefulness of what Socrates has suggested. And he is surely impressed by Socrates' focus on the political realm, a realm where actions, or *deeds*, are especially important.

We will conclude with a few observations. As we have mentioned, Socrates has allowed his final sequence of questions and suggestive remarks to be interpreted according to this assumption: that he is offering an answer to the question of what the one who is to philosophize must learn. However, Socrates says nothing to affirm explicitly that this is his intention. In fact, if we recall his remarks leading up to the final sequence, Socrates seems to suggest that what he is going to do is show that philosophy *is not* 'to have become serious about the arts nor to live as a busybody, stooping down and learning many things'. Socrates does suggest he has something else in mind, but because he has not explicitly connected philosophy to the 'seven-fold-art', we cannot assume he has shown what philosophy is by showing what it is not. This raises some significant questions. What, if anything

[95] This is not to suggest that this is the only thing Socrates does to win over the athlete.

does Socrates' alternative have to do with philosophy? And can we recover a defence of philosophy as a noble activity from what Socrates leaves us with? Finally, how do these observations bear on what the dialogue has to teach us as a whole? Given its subtitle, we seem to be licensed to expect that this dialogue reveals something about philosophy, but how are we to refine these expectations in light of what we have uncovered thus far?

VIII. Concluding Observations

The various concerns we have raised in the course of the preceding commentary can be gathered under the over-arching interpretive question: what does this dialogue teach about philosophy? Having noted its problematic conclusion (pp. 72-74), it is clear that if there is a response to this question, it is not simple or straightforward. This is to suggest that we must look beyond what Socrates says, or rather, look at what he says in conjunction with what he does, and consider the significance of both together. If *Lovers* has something to teach about philosophy, as we are led to believe, it will surely involve the *example* Plato provides of Socrates – the philosopher – conversing about philosophy.

The argument of the dialogue can be construed as a 'defence' of philosophy - a defence Socrates mounts to address the charge levelled by the athlete: that philosophy is trivial, hence useless and perhaps even shameful. By the end of the discussion, the athlete along with the other listeners, are clearly persuaded otherwise as they come to affiliate philosophy with Socrates' most useful 'seven-fold-art'. However, to suggest that this notion exhausts the dialogue's teaching would be a gross over-simplification. As we saw earlier, the conversation quickly moves from the athlete's charge to his rival's opposite conceit – that philosophy is something noble, and later, something good and useful. Thus, Socrates is not simply defending philosophy against the athlete. He is addressing and ultimately mediating between two opposed positions. On the face of it, this is a contest between two lovers over the affections of a boy. But in another sense, their

antagonism runs deeper: it is a rivalry of opinions, of loves, of conceptions of the good – a rivalry between two *types* and their respectively distinct ways of life. And because of Socrates' 'provocation', this rivalry comes to a head over the question of philosophy – its perceived nature and worth.

The rival lovers effectively represent a typical split in opinion, signifying how philosophy is apt to be regarded by two generic and rather comprehensive types found in the polity. More precisely, each lover represents a problem for philosophy's relation to political life: the 'commonsensical' athlete is dismissive and suspicious; the 'sophisticated' musical lover is supercilious and alienating. And their natural antipathy is sharpened by the fact that each covets the same object of desire. This drives the two lovers to stake out diametric positions, and the tension impedes either one from considering philosophy (or any topic) from a more moderate standpoint. Needless to say, this competitive hostility is anything but conducive to friendly, well-intentioned, mutually profitable discussion. And if, as we assume, Socrates desires conversation – or desires to lead the others to meaningful conversation (as opposed to 'eristic' dispute) – he must dampen if not dissipate this opposition. In the immediate sense, this amounts to settling the reputation of philosophy favorably through countenancing a conception of philosophy both lovers will find agreeable.

Socrates indicates he is self-conscious of the situation he finds himself in, something we are alerted to by the tacit parallel he draws between himself and Odysseus. We do not want to overstate the significance of this, but merely to note how the reference highlights the 'political' dimension of the dialogue.

After reaching an impasse in the argument, Socrates 'playfully' asks the two rivals, 'Are you willing, since we are at a loss, for us to ask these two boys here? Or are we perhaps ashamed, as Homer says the suitors were, who didn't deign that there would be another who would string the bow.' Because we have examined the dialogue in its entirety, we know that Socrates was not 'at a loss', that, indeed, he had a conception of what has to do with philosophizing all along.[96] Socrates feigns ignorance, as he does throughout the dialogue (recall his opening remarks to the athlete), and like Odysseus, he 'hides' himself amongst the suitors. Socrates knows he could have answered his own question, much as Odysseus knows he could string his prize bow. But as noted earlier, the real challenge for Odysseus is maintaining his disguise until the time is right to seize the situation – to spring his plan to remove the suitors from his household. What is telling about the parallel Socrates has drawn is that it points to the issue of legitimate rule, and what is involved in securing it. For Odysseus, this amounts to reclaiming his property and rightful inheritance. For Socrates, it is a matter of directing the thoughts and behavior with respect to the 'household' of philosophy. But where Odysseus punishes the rival suitors rather severely, Socrates reclaims sovereignty over his 'household' and 'lordship' over the pacified lovers in a far more subtle and gracious manner[97].

So what, then, does Socrates really achieve by his establishing and then ruling their conversation? Are his listeners benefited by the experience? And what

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[96] This would include the 'expert' Socrates had just asked about ('Whom would we justly ask about the planting and sowing in the soul of the things to be learned, how much and what sort is the measured amount?').

[97] Perhaps there is significance to Dionysius' conspicuous absence from the dialogue. In a sense, Socrates effectively replaces Dionysius as educator, and in his parting remarks, he offers 'advice' to his 'students' as to which learnables they ought to pursue. Applied 'reflexively' to the dialogue, Socrates' example might be taken as a 'response' to the question which occasioned the 'aporia' at 135a.

does his example show us about philosophy? By the end of the dialogue, Socrates seems to have turned both rivals away from their polarized positions – a testament to Socrates' knowledge of human types and his prudence or ability to adapt his rule to immediate circumstances. With respect to each rival, we observe Socrates utilize something like the 'art of improvement' he introduces as part of his alternative conception of philosophy.

To disarm the athlete, Socrates encourages him to participate in the discussion and then 'rewards' him for doing so. This is most clearly exemplified when Socrates creates an opportunity for the athlete to embarrass his rival. In this way, Socrates communicates to him that he, unlike the musical lover, is not dismissive toward the 'unsophisticated'. And what is more, the athlete – being a man of deeds – is especially apt to appreciate how Socrates *uses* speech to direct the discussion in order to *do* something.

Compared to his rival, the musical lover's experience is nothing short of painful. Though offering conventionally defensible views of philosophy, he is never given the benefit of the doubt, and in the short duration of the discussion, he is embarrassed twice by Socrates. We might say Socrates deliberately misinterpreted his remarks to 'punish' him, not so much for what he says, but to encourage an 'attitude adjustment'. By having his ignorance exposed in the way he does, the musical lover's *hubris*, his unjustified arrogance is tamed, and his 'philosophical' conceits are undermined. Uncomfortable as it doubtless is, the musical lover is benefited by being awakened to his ignorance – the true starting point for any serious self-examination and philosophical reflection. But Socrates

does not deprive his interlocutor of all his previous assurances. By the end of the dialogue, the musical lover believes he was mistaken about what philosophy is, but *not* that he was wrong to praise it.

Both rivals are, in fact, 'raised' to a level of ignorance. This is manifest as Socrates leads the discussion into an aporetic impasse, and both are reduced to silence (prompting the Odysseus allusion, 135a). But more importantly, through Socrates' influence, the two lovers are made to recognize their respective ignorance about each other. The athlete comes to regard philosophy as a worthwhile activity, and so realizes that the musical lover's initial praise of philosophy was not altogether misguided. On the other side, the musical lover is made to see that the athlete, when speaking from his own experience, does have a contribution to make to the discussion, and thus realizes he was wrong to dismiss the athlete as practically mindless, without giving him a fair hearing. What Socrates has effectively done is to encourage both rivals towards becoming friendly or at least better disposed to each other. Putting the most optimistic interpretation on this, it is possible that when the two young men meet again, they might actually have a meaningful conversation. As it stands, the lovers themselves are limited types, limited in the sense of being both defined and narrowed by their dominant loves. By bringing them together, their mutual influence may lead both to becoming more 'complete' or 'well-rounded' as each learns to appreciate the value of both a musical and gymnastic education. As it turns out, the real benefit in store for either lover may issue from conversation with the other. This is not to suggest that this experience would make the two lovers 'philosophical', but rather may dispose each

toward appreciating the value of dialogue, where opinions and experiences are discussed in a meaningful mutually enlightening way. For those who have taken up philosophy, experience would surely confirm that this kind of genuine communication – examining oneself and others – comprises much of what we might call 'philosophic activity'[98].

It is important to note that the conception of philosophy Socrates leaves the two lovers with also helps to mitigate their rivalry. Philosophy as the 'seven-fold-art' is something both can embrace because its range compasses subjects the two doubtless find attractive (on the grounds of utility and, importantly, because of their perceived nobility). Socrates has, then, done two things by identifying philosophy with his multi-faceted art: he successfully defends philosophy against the charge of uselessness; and in so doing, he attaches philosophy to politics, effectively utilizing the assumed nobility and importance of politics as a 'lure'. This is not to imply that the 'alternative' conception of philosophy Socrates offers is false, or merely a clever ruse. On the contrary – the topics of interest Socrates calls attention to are of permanent philosophical significance, especially to those who would seek to understand the nature of man and political life.[99] But whereas Socrates himself doubtless understands the real importance of the questions he raises, his listeners do not, at least not yet and perhaps may never. But they are in a better position to approach these questions, and have clearly been turned toward them, albeit for reasons that differ from Socrates' own. This is to say that Socrates' interlocutors

[98] This activity would be integral to 'Self-Knowledge' as it is pointed to and partially described by Socrates in the last leg of the argument.
[99] As we observed earlier, the last section of the dialogue draws our attention to the problems of punishment and justice, virtue, self-knowledge, and the art of rule.

and auditors in *Lovers* are persuaded of a conception of philosophy for reasons Socrates may not share, at least not entirely.[100] This adds to the notion of Socrates having 'disguised' himself, however, and suggests that what Socrates has implied about philosophy has been misleading.

On the other hand, would it not be *unreasonable* to expect that those who come to philosophy do so for 'philosophic' reasons? Is it not the case that all who come to philosophy are 'misled' by suppositions and assumptions they have about philosophy, suppositions made without having *experienced* philosophy? And after having taken it up, is there not a change in character – a 'turning around' of the soul – that could not possibly have been understood prior to the experience, let alone anticipated? And it might very well be the case that those questions Socrates points toward, questions that pertain to human things – questions about virtue, the good life, and political right – are precisely those which most encourage such a psychic revolution. Stepping back from the dialogue, we see Socrates propagating philosophy in various ways, including both explicit endorsement and implicit suggestion. He guides the discussion from behind a mask of irony; he encourages an awareness of ignorance, punishes presumption, rewards participation, and exploits his listeners' assumptions about the noble and the good. In summary, we might say that *Lovers* provides a portrait of the philosopher propagating philosophy amongst the un-philosophic to attract the pre-philosophic.

But this leaves us to consider the problem we noted earlier, that Socrates does not actually call the conception of philosophy he offers 'philosophy'. By way of addressing this, we must bear in mind what Socrates does not say in this dialogue

[100] Cf. Bruell, pp. 103-108 *The Roots of Political Philosophy.*

– a conspicuous exclusion the opening context of the discussion alerts us to. There, in describing the boys' argument – which involves familiarity with various theories about the heavens - Socrates indirectly affirms his 'former' preoccupation with natural philosophy. This is the only allusion to natural, 'pre-Socratic' philosophy in the dialogue. Noting Socrates' silent omission of natural philosophy, we will suggest that he does not call his 'alternative', the 'seven-fold-art', 'philosophy' because it does not cover the full range of concerns philosophy must embrace. This, of course, would include questions of natural philosophy, and metaphysics or 'first philosophy'. Instead, Socrates chooses to privilege the study of human things, and we have discussed some of the reasons as to why he does so. In this connection we cannot forget the two boys who abandon their fervent 'philosophic' dispute about heavenly things, in order to listen to Socrates lead a discussion about human things.[101]

As Socrates' narrative asides make clear, he is keenly aware of the presence of the two boys, and seems especially thrilled by the fact that they decide to attend to the discussion. Like the two rivals, the boys come away from their encounter with a conception of philosophy which has, at its core, gaining knowledge about the human form of being, and most importantly, self-knowledge. In a sense, the value

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[101] In his interpretation of the dialogue, Bruell stresses the significance of the boys' shift in attention, (perhaps to the neglect of the musical lover and the athlete) suggesting that their 'turn' reflects or echoes Socrates' own change in philosophic orientation.

> It is not very significant for our purposes that our "philosopher" acknowledged openly his opinion that philosophizing is noble; it is much more significant that Socrates' questioning of the "philosopher" on this point silenced the boys and drew their attention to the Socratic discussion. Their attitude toward philosophizing may not have been very different from that of the young Socrates himself, in whose opinion the wisdom called "inquiry into nature" – to know the causes of each thing – was a "splendid" thing (*Phaedo* 96a5-10, cf. *Lysis* 215e1-216a2).

Roots of Political Philosophy pg. 104.

of this conception of philosophy is underscored by what they witness during the argument. For the musical lover is shamed for extolling philosophy without being able to account for what it is: he extols that which he does not understand, and, thus, does not really know what he is attracted to and why. Given the possibility that these boys might actively pursue philosophy in the future, Socrates alerts them to the paradox of being impressed by the 'great and noble' questions, hence being drawn to pursue them, without pausing to ask *why* these questions are so attractive, and whether these questions have any personal value. To those who leap quickly toward the summits of inquiry – the cosmological questions of first philosophy – the essential human matters (including the psychology that would explain and make possible philosophy) tend to be neglected. As Socrates asks Glaukon in *Republic*: 'To an understanding endowed with magnificence and the contemplation of all time and all being, do you think it possible that human life seem anything great?' 'Impossible', he replies.[102] Glaukon, like others of his 'tribe', is very impressed with Socrates' dazzling presentation of philosophy. And doubtless, the grandeur of certain questions draws the soul upwards and can imbue the understanding with 'magnificence'. But this grandeur cannot be simply presumed, nor remain unquestioned. As we see in *Lovers*, it is necessary to be able to give an account of philosophizing – why it is a choice-worthy activity - and this cannot be done adequately by simply espousing its nobility. One can have prejudices about philosophy, prejudices born out of recognizing it as a noble activity - prejudices that may lie at the heart of why one took up philosophy to begin with - but these prejudices will not suffice when one is called to account for the activity itself. The

[102] *Republic* 486a.

problem with being impressed with the nobility of philosophy is that of taking its goodness for granted. It is worth noting that, in *Lovers,* Socrates does not talk about philosophy in the exalted language he uses in *Republic*. With regard to the two listening boys, it seems he would not have to persuade them of its noble character. Instead, Socrates turns the boys to the *question* of philosophy's presumed nobility and goodness. He leaves them with the impression that philosophy is choice-worthy because it is both noble and good, but its defensibility resides in making its 'goodness' explicit.

What Socrates does, says, and does not say in *Lovers* seems to point to this conclusion: that for those interested in philosophy, it may be best to leave aside certain assumptions about what philosophy is, and begin by questioning those aspects of life that are bound up with our immediate concerns – and thereby experience philosophy first hand. In all fairness, one might say that this merely replaces one conception of philosophy with another. True, but one must begin somewhere, and that this is an appropriate starting point seems confirmed by how Socrates directs his listeners. What recommends this alternative is that it opens a path toward self-understanding, and is therefore ultimately self-conscious about the attraction to philosophy and being concerned with how it is beneficial. Here, we cannot forget Socrates' example, that he demonstrates the value of prudential knowledge, and perhaps turns others to the human sphere so that they might benefit in a similar way – a benefit only won by learning to 'think politically'. But that this is merely a starting point is also reflected in the incompleteness of Socrates' apparent definition of philosophy. How natural philosophy, or the questions

Socrates does *not* address in this dialogue, fits with philosophizing about human things – that is to say, political philosophy – is a matter of significant interest, but cannot be addressed from within the purview of this dialogue.

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